

ISSUE
20

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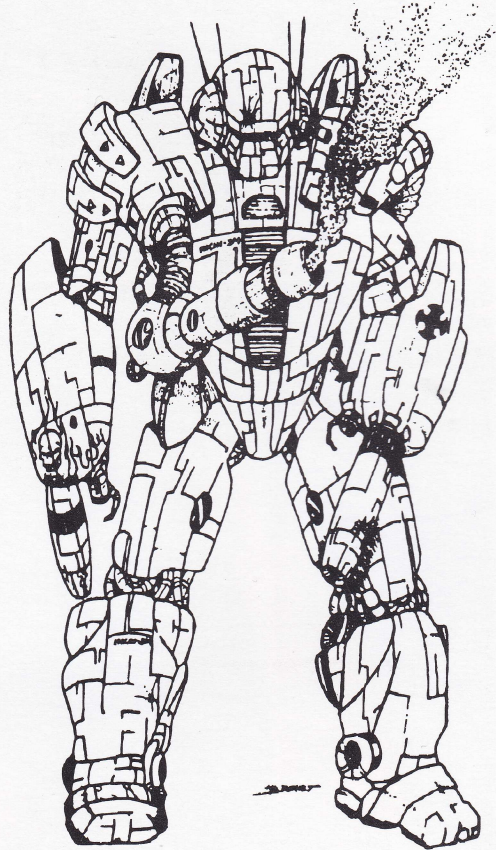
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Australian Realms

The Role Playing Supplement

ISSUE 20

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1994

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Kindly supplied by White Wolf

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Letters

**Matthew Frederick
Shepparton, VIC**

Dear Realms,

First, and I know everyone who writes in says this, but let me just say REALMS is the best RPG magazine on the market today. It really gives DRAGON a run for its money, particularly with its independent outlook.

Now that I've got that out of the way, let's get down to the real reasons why I wrote this letter. Firstly, it seems to me that many GM's lack imagination when it comes to the setting of their RPG's. I don't see anything wrong with using published settings, Unae is one of the main reasons that I buy REALMS, but it's the lack of self-reliance that bugs me. If your RPG doesn't have that much information on a certain region then just make it up! It's not as stupid as it sounds and it's a lot better than sitting round, waiting for that supplement to come out. When I first started gaming, all the material that I had on the world was a map of a small region of the world and vague information on two of the cities on this map. Yet I managed to run a satisfying campaign with some very enjoyable adventures.

Secondly, violence in gaming. Why is a player character killing a NPC taken so lightly by most players? Murder is one of the most evil acts possible yet in RPG's it is taken as part of the character's everyday life. The "Facing the Consequences" article in issue 14 (yes, I know that that's going back a fair way) was good on this matter, but not perfect. Experience point penalties, carting characters off to jail and so forth is too up front. Be gentle about it. Gradually steer the players in the right direction and don't just snap "Right, you lose X number of XP's", this just leads to bad feelings. Give the characters a mission where they have to capture someone alive or against a NPC which is far more powerful than them, resulting in a true role-playing situation where cunning is more important than brute force.

Matthew, we love that kinda comparison... but we think we can do even better which is why we have made changes this issue (see my editorial).

As to referees lacking imagination - I'm not sure what in Realms gave you that impression, but we find that most readers rarely take what we print and transfer it

wholesale into their games. They prefer to cherry-pick ideas from our articles and customise them to fit their campaigns.

**Jerome Hope
Bathurst, NSW**

Dear Nick,

I thought I might give you a response to TSR asking you to stop publishing AD&D related material. It seems as though TSR is afraid of a little competition. First they put a stop to Gary Gygax's Dangerous Journeys and now this. It looks as though they're out to put an end to anything which threatens their control of an ever growing market. Good luck to you and your magazine, you thoroughly deserve it.

Jerome, again we appreciate this support, we had many such letters. I think you hit the proverbial nail on the head when you talk about control. That is the issue. TSR have a understandable desire to control the way their game is packaged because they've had troubles in the past with certain groups in the US... Realms might have let slip the secret rpg fetish for demons and virgin sacrifices, ya know!

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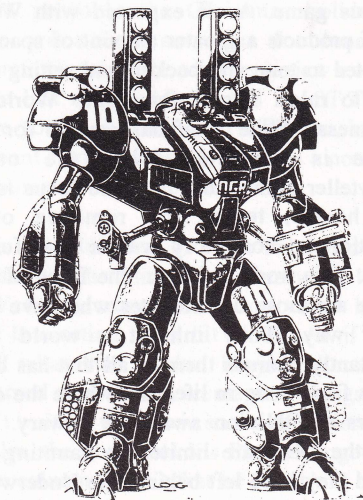
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Storyteller Game by White Wolf
Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

The rules themselves are thankfully kept to a minimum (a five page section outlines all the basic mechanics of the game!), and are again consistent with the the other

Wraith: The Oblivion is a storytelling game. It is a step aside from traditional adventure roleplaying where usually the

For veterans and the uninitiated (where have you been for the past ten years?), the *BattleTech Compendium* is a good repackaging of an excellent game and would make a lovely Christmas present. Nick, I can keep this review copy, can't I?

THE COMPLETE DRUID'S HANDBOOK

AD&D 2nd Edition Accessory by TSR

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard.

One of the first non-fighter characters I ever played was a druid, and I remember that he spent an entire adventure fighting one giant tick after another (the random monster tables were much smaller in those days), so I was particularly interested in checking out this supplement. I am happy to say that the *Complete Druid's Handbook* does much to improve on what originally was a very limited character class.

While the druid class still has its problems, the authors of *Complete Druid* have done their best to widen the scope, power and abilities of the druid. A number of new "portraits" are introduced, removing the need for all druids to be tied to forests, as are a number of interesting and practical character kits (*guardian*, *outlaw*, *shapeshifter*, and *wanderer* among others). The druidic magic section adds a number of new spells and magical items, which finally gives the druid the ability to hold his/her own against other character classes.

In a similar vein, the authors have also tried to overcome the "solitary" nature of the druid ("I'd really like to come with you down that dungeon, but I must stay and water my trees..."), by giving suggestions on how to play a truly neutral character, how a druid might fit in with other player characters, and how to centre a full campaign around a druid character. TSR have certainly done a far better job with this aspect of the druid class than they did with either the Ranger or Paladin Handbooks, even though all three tend to suffer from the same complaint. The remaining chapters in the book cover the Druidic Order and sacred groves, which are the "safe havens" of your druid character.

Perhaps the only complaint I would have with the book is that, once again, TSR have failed to produce a roleplaying supplement that doesn't contain at least one picture that panders to hormonally driven male sexual fantasies. All in all though, I can find little else wrong with this supplement. If you like the idea of having a go at a druid character, then this wouldn't be a bad way to start.

MINDWERKS

Rifts Sourcebook Three

By Palladium Inc

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Somewhere in the midst of the dark forests of a post-Apocalypse Germany, deep underground lie the secret laboratories of Mindwerks. Here, the Angel of Death conducts sadistic experiments in order to create creatures with enhanced powers

through the use of M.O.M. (Mind Over Matter) technology. Here creatures are turned out whose enhancements rival the products of the Juicers, but without the drug dependencies; the fact that M.O.M. tends to make the recipient crazy is a minor inconvenience (and this from the land of Mom and apple pie).

Mindwerks, the latest sourcebook for the ever-expanding Rifts roleplaying game, details the characters, bots, and beasts of the Germany/Poland region of Rifts Europe. Once again Siembieda has assembled a marvelously imaginative collection of player and non-player character types as well as the usual assortment of megadeath-dealing machines and super spiky monsters. Alongside the detailed descriptions of the horrors of the Mindwerks labs, there is also information on the Black Forest region which includes evil Millennium Trees. The pick of the various new class of npc villains detailed are the Genesplacers, a cold-hearted alien breed who delight in breaking down and rebuilding the very genes which compose a species.

No prizes for guessing what inspired the Angel of Death whose experiments and torturing of innocents takes place in secret installations in the Germany/Poland border region. If you can get over this rather tasteless imagery then you'll find *Mindwerks* is yet another imaginative and value packed addition to Rifts.

DENVER: THE CITY OF SHADOWS

Shadowrun Campaign Set by FASA

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This weighty release comes as a boxed campaign set for running in the shadows, a mile a high. Welcome to the Treaty City, the Front Range Free Zone. Here the city has been split into six sectors, all governed by a different nation. They're all here, the powers of North America; the Sioux, Ute, Pueblo, UCAS, CAS and Aztlan nations. So, what happens when you mix these guys all up, well it's got to be seen to be believed. This setting is a place of confusion and danger, with the emphasis on confusion. Here, I have to give credit to the writers for being able to get across the feel of the city, its machinations and more without leaving me totally bewildered. They said Denver was confusing, and they weren't wrong. But any referee who is going to use the set will be smugly looking at the perplexed faces of his players because at least he (with his own special GM's book) knows what is truly going on.

The Denver boxed set comes with two laminated hard-card ID cards for different sectors (very nice, will have to put them in my wallet) a big map of Down Town, a smaller map of showing the sector borders, the GM's book and the Denver: City of Shadows book (public access data).



Artwork and presentation is very good, the maps and ID passes very high quality. The two books, great value. The public guide is 167 pages, and includes an index. It showcases Denver's history, personalities, locations and different sectors. It is quite possibly one of the best produced setting books FASA has done to date for Shadowrun; very usable. The GM's book is 60+ pages and covers special rules for Denver, plus some home truths your players won't need to know (yet!). It holds more detail on the sectors and personalities running the show, plus information on how the high altitude city affects players.

Overall the boxed set is superb. If you're running in Seattle, might be time to take a detour to Denver. If you want to set up a new campaign in the city I can't help but wonder, when your players get to grips with the confusing city if they will ever want to go back to simple Seattle.

Very good.

ROUGH GUIDE TO THE UK

Cyberpunk sourcebook

By R.Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Paul Mitting

You can just about hear the bad Cockney accents being mouthed already as you read this new supplement from R.Talsorian. Obviously, it's a sourcebook that details the United Kingdoms of 2022. The viewpoint is that of an outsider encountering the blessed isles for the first time.

The book covers the expected topics of government, military and police presences, some political and social history, sports, media and so on. It also gives a few quirky topics some rather extensive coverage. There are 5 pages devoted to the food and drink you can get in the UK, and how likely your chances of food poisoning are from the aforesaid. Another useful section regards organised crime in the UK. Nearly every major player in big time crime wants a slice of the British pie, and they want it bad. Lots of opportunities for an enterprising 'punk.

There are two major upheavals to the British way of life that are quite detailed. The first is the loss of the Royal Family, it's replacement by the MLA (Martial Law Authority), and the demise of the MLA and re-instatement of the Monarchy through Queen Victoria the Second. Heaps of corporate and government double dealing and backstabbing - a good chance to do some retroactive roleplaying during those turbulent times if you're interested.

The other upheaval was the formation of the Tribes and their political front, the NFU (National Faith Union). After some seriously stupid moves (eg: firing on unarmed new age believers who wanted to

worship at Stonehenge), the MLA and now the Monarchy have allowed certain tracts of land to be run by the tribes. Some are just souped-up flower children, others are full-on Celtic lifestyle believers with ritual sacrifice and tribal warfare rumoured to be rife.

To round out the sourcebook, there is a section on British weapons and vehicles (check out the MPK-2020 12mm SMG with special 95% kill rate rounds, hmmm, my mouth is watering already), and of course a region by region summary. Each area is given a varying amount of background and adventure hooks, with the odd useful NPC to encounter.

Phew. That's quite a lot of ground covered in one sourcebook. So how good is it all? The text is well written, illustrations are plentiful and many are quite good, with the rest of average quality.

On the down side I have one quibble. There is not enough background given to some aspects of the game, and possibly too much to others. I think the basic problem is they are trying to give you everything they can about the UK in only 128 pages. If R.Talsorian plan a campaign adventure book for the UK, that will fill in the gaps nicely.

I would definitely recommend this product to any discerning CyberPunk player interested in gaming the UK. It's a solid package with great gaming potential.

RAGE ACROSS AUSTRALIA

Werewolf sourcebook by White Wolf

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This latest regional sourcebook for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* comes in above expectations in almost every category. Through a hefty 140+ pages, details are presented on every relevant aspect of Australia in White Wolf's World of Darkness setting. From the truth of the shameful genocide of the Bunyip tribe, to the foreign Garou tribes who are responsible for such events and their attempts to placate the spirits of the Dreamtime. This is a work well apart from any other produced to date for the Werewolf game.

The book covers in detail the history of Australia, and its unique (but now former) status as the last bastion of the untainted Gaia. It also holds sections covering Australia's geography, colonisation (by both non-Aboriginals and those such as the Kindred, Garou and Mages) and the Dreaming. Here the Dreamtime is exposed as the local Umbra, revealing in a clever method Australia's and the Aboriginals' close ties with the Earth, each other and the spirit world. Excellent.

Subsequent sections deal with caerns, the influence of the Wyrms, contemporary history and the personalities of this wide

brown land. With an A3 colour fold out map and a well planned story in the back of the book it comes in at great value.

My only disappointment with the product is the standard of black and white art, which while often good does occasionally falter... but such complaints don't detract from the quality of the overall work.

If you play Werewolf and are looking for a good setting to head to; Australia should be your destination. The background can only add new dimensions to any chronicle. Or if you are just interested in seeing what fellow Australians, Watts, Rudgley and Chessell have done to the nation in the World of Darkness, *Rage Across Australia* is worth a look. Good stuff, congratulations to all concerned.

PLANES OF CHAOS

Planescape Expansion by TSR Inc

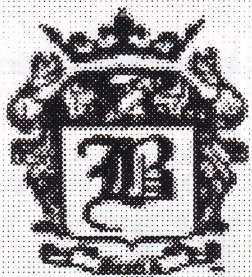
Reviewed by Adam Whitt

Realms watchers will be well aware of my feelings about Planescape, I love it.

I longingly awaited this second boxed set for the psychedelic campaign setting. Opening the box I drooled over its contents - a 128 page referee guide to the chaotic planes, *The Book of Chaos*; *The Travelogue*, a 48 page quick guide for referee and players; the 32 page *Chaos Adventures*, a book of adventure hooks and ideas; a 32 page *Monstrous* supplement; and five poster sized full colour maps (each with a reverse side printed either with another illustration or campaign notes). All of these components feature more of the fabulous DiTerlizzi artwork, the stuff that gives Planescape its unique and exciting feel. And I especially liked the quirky typographical tricks (strangely mixed fonts, disordered words and deliberate misspellings - not unlike Australian Realms really, huh?) the design team have introduced to set the tone of chaos in this product.

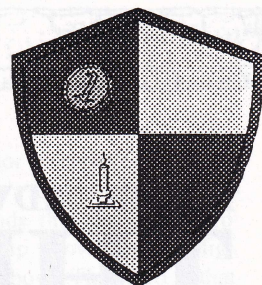
Actually, *Planes of Chaos*, is a bit of a mixed bag all round - varying in content and quality. Some of the finer details of the chaos planes are too quickly glossed over to be truly useful, but then there are moments of great inspiration that show you to the heart of this innovative setting and drags your *roleplaying* soul in. Overall the background information is colourful, suitably strange and inclusive rather than exclusive (which is a complaint that can be levelled at some previous TSR worlds - "You can't do that, because..."). Some of the places (Pandemonium is WILD) would be tough to adventure in, but then that's the whole point out there, isn't it?

Armed with this boxed set, an insane referee can present some truly wonderful adventures... who'd want to play in the lawful realms anyway? Better than most. ■



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TRAGIC ADVENTURE FROM THE REALMS CAMPAIGN WORLD OF UNAE

THE DOOMED CITY

The grey sea churned like an angry beast. The wind whipped and tore chaotically, the waves lashing at the flotilla of elven ships that made for the doomed port city of Ossard. Standing at the flagship's rail was Forwao, renowned emissary of High King Caemarou of Wair-Rae. Above him billowed the sails while coloured flags flirled with the wind, constantly darting this way and that. Above them all, mused Forwao, played the divine.

Here at Ossard the immortal and mortal would meet, the real and unreal. Today was a day that marked all Unae, today was the beginning of the end.

Starting quietly at the nearing port walls Forwao pondered how long it would take for the world to be reduced to a blood-soaked lump of clay. Planning not to see it in his remaining years he wondered what the people of that time would be like when Unae's final days came and the many separate battles slowly spread, joined and then merged into one worldwide orgy of death and violence. He had foreseen the future and its bleakness; fortunately the human's madness would be something the elves would avoid, but at such a price.

The elven Armageddon was beckoning.

To either side of the flagship, as far as the eye could see were the naval warships of Wair-Rae. Tens of thousands of soldiers had been assembled for this show of strength, Forwao shed five tears for he knew that less than half would survive.

A chill ran the length of Forwao's spine. No, today would be a day of great battle, but it would be a dark day for all but the gods. Many thousands would die and the only victor would be the accursed kults that this campaign was designed to destroy.

Madness.

He turned from the shadowed city-state that climbed from the nearing shore. He would come no closer, he would not be a part of this anymore. It was late winter, if he turned home now he would be back in time for the Tergaia festival, the celebration of spring. He had seen enough.

As he made his way back to his cabin his sense tingled and the air prickled. Stopping, he waited until a deep voice purred nearby.

"Forwao. May we have the pleasure of your company?"

Turning to face the man addressing him, Forwao stared into the dark hood of the most powerful Cabalist in all of Dormetia, Jeunet Karo, a Burvois Sango Drajo, a feared blood mage.

He could do nothing but oblige.

The elven fleet sailed onto Ossard, minus one charlatan. As the fleet neared the coast, the sky grew deep grey as a storm emerged from behind the dark city, lashing at them like a frenzied flagellant.

THE ADVENTURE

Against the background of Ossard's fall (see issues 17-19) this scenario gets your players to the doomed city-state and into the thick of things. The adventure is presented in our preferred generic format but is readily converted to the **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons™**, **Warhammer FRP™**, **Palladium FRP™**, or **GURPS Fantasy™** games. The power levels of characters depends on what you, the referee, and your players. This adventure leaves a great deal of freedom for both you and your players. Come to Ossard, but beware: this is a city in its death throes.

SETTING, TONE AND THEMES

The adventure is set in the Australian Realms campaign world of Unae, specifically in the Dormetian city-state of Ossard. Recently this eighth member of the Heletian League (a trading group made up of the eight human Heletian nations) has broken off all contact with the other League states. It has also spurned the attempts of the mighty Church of Baimiopia to shepherd the renegade city-state back into the faithful fold.

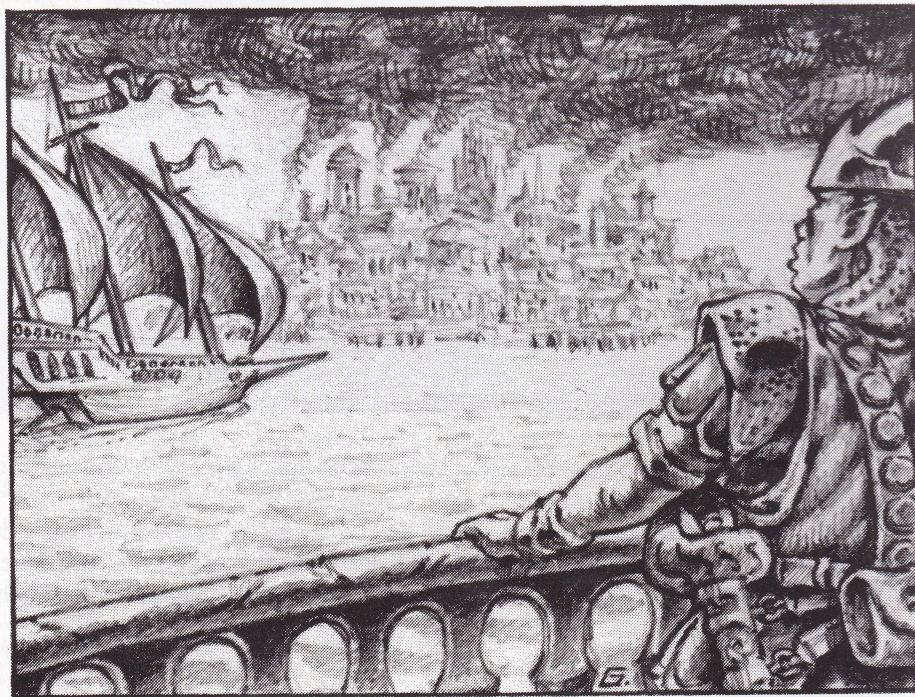
The tone and theme of this adventure is one a terrible tragedy. The city-state has unwittingly succumbed to the warping influence of the growing power of the Gargoyle Spirit Queen (a divine incarnation) which has manifested in the nearby Quersic Quor hive of Kalraith. The once faithful people of Ossard have been corrupted and lead astray by kults, opportunists and the outlawed (in Heletian nations) Cabal. In an orgy of rioting,

looting and violence the city-state threw off its shackles, killing the local Benefice to the Church of Baimiopia, their previous Lord and anyone else who would not embrace the returned "old ways".

Overnight the number of religions openly worshipped in the city went from one to dozens. With so many temples being sanctified to so many different gods, a divine focus the likes of which hasn't been seen since the incarnation of St Baimio over five hundred years ago settled on the city. So strong is this focus of mortal yearning for divine attention that reality in the city has become warped; all things are possible in Ossard. Sadly, humanity being what it is, this has created a living hell on Unae.

Naturally, this focus has sent shockwaves throughout Dormetia, and indeed across all of Unae. To the elves of Wair-Rae and far away Ungria it has been hailed as the first in a series of prophetised signs of their race's coming Armageddon. To the Heletians, Ossard's fall and the laying of Mortigi's Curse on Porto Baimio (which occurred the same day Ossard fell to the kultists, seeing a night of divine magic that sent many priests into madness, and others fleeing the city only able to return a month and a day later), mark a terrifying new era which few can explain.

While the full ramifications of the focus have not yet been realised its effect has been worst in Ossard, where opportunists took advantage of the often ridiculed "northerner" Heletians, summoning (with the aid of several Cabalists) a storm that they set upon the port city to help cloak it from inter-



ference and to magnify the strengthening flow of divine magic. This magnified power became what is known as a divine focus.

The kultists used this opportunity to rise and take the city, with the wild storms hampering communications and subverting the faith of those in the city (and with a solid alliance of a large number of Cabalists), Ossard faced a bleak future. Within months news had spread that the city-state had fallen, and Greater Baimiopia sent one hundred and fifty of her best warriors to cleanse the city, only for them to be killed by magical means, their bodies displayed garishly back in the most holy of cities, sacred Baimiopia (issue 19).

But even the instigators of this change could not foresee its tragic conclusion. Hoping to wrest political and economic power in tandem with their hold over the city's spirit, the kultists and Cabal have found themselves unable to control the chaos they have wrought. Into this maelstrom enter your players; in Ossard, reality is theirs' to mould.

FORMAT

To fit the tragic scope of the adventure, the scenario is presented here as the last act of a series of events which have been described over the last three issues (see *Ossard I, II & III* in issue's 17 - 19). The report of the Elves' Invasion given here marks the climax of that series. We suggest you use these colourful reports as background to set the atmosphere for the events they become involved in. To help you create the adventure in Ossard we have outlined one main plotline, and then a number of subplots which you can expand, change or add to as you see fit. Beside this, we have detailed the main encounter areas of the city.

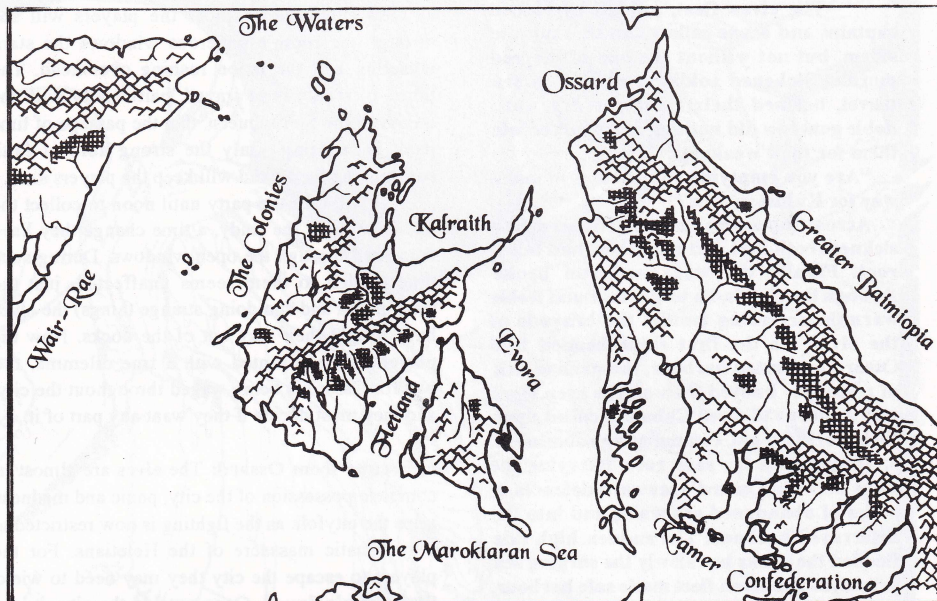
With these tools, and your imagination you can create an exciting and testing city-based adventure steeped in the red blood of tragedy.

THE PLOT LINES

The players are sent to Ossard to retrieve the Holy Sword of St Baimio by an agent of a Heletian collector. They are given an NPC as a guide to the city and free passage there. They are involved in a race against time as the city is about to be invaded. Although they are sent a full week before the elves are expected to arrive from Wair-Rae, they actually arrive on the dawn of the day the elves attack (the elvish fleet has sped across the sea by Elvish Cabalist inspired winds). The central plot is one of a search, discovery and escape. The subplots will lengthen playing time and add more to the atmosphere of terror.

CENTRAL PLOT

1. 'Bring To Me The Sword': The players are secretly hired by an agent for a "well known" Heletian merchant from the city of Vangre. In fact their employer is Vangre's Reganto, Vincenzo Heletiano - the most powerful man in the Kramer Confederation. His agent is an Evoran trader by the name of Achmed Khanoda who will approach the players and offer them good pay (25% as an advance of an 800 florin fee) and free passage to Ossard if they are prepared to "attain a certain collectible" before the elven invasion arrives. Once in Ossard their supplied guide (a nephew of Achmed's, enter Salib) will give them the full details of what they are looking for; the legendary Holy Sword of St Baimio.



This most holy of Heletian artifacts was sent to Ossard with the recently defeated force of inquisitors and Des Sankta Glavos (issues 18 & 19). Now that the church has lost the relic, the player's employer wants to attain it (whether for his own collection or for sale Salib nor Achmed knows).

2. Passage to Ossard: Salib secures passage for himself and the players on a Burvois ship captained by Pierre Mathou. The voyage is beset by a number of minor mishaps - a slow leak which has the ship listing to one side; a crewman falls from the rigging and breaks his neck; a plague of rats foul the ship's rations - so that by the time they come within a few days of Ossard the captain and his crew are becoming increasingly reluctant to complete their commission. Then, within sight of the city an ill wind blows up and the ship is caught in a storm. The captain heads for the shelter of shore and lands the players at sunrise, several hours walk to the south of the city.

3. The Open City: The players arrive in the outskirts of Ossard an hour or two after the dawn of its last day in the hands of the Heletians (Salib is convinced the elves are still a week away). They will find the gates wide open and unattended and once inside the city proper they have most of the day to investigate the wretched place before they hear of the elven invasion.

4. A City Of Corruption: Once in the city the players will discover a warped reality, one which they have never before seen, experienced or even conceived; kultists openly walk the streets, proudly displaying their faith by wearing symbols, broaches and embroidered designs.

In corrupt Ossard streets seem empty when they are full, magic is as common as violence and passion, and there is no distinction between night and day. While the sky might darken the city streets will be as busy as market day. This is a city with no force of law and order, no organisation, frequent violence and continual change.

If the players make enquiries or attempt to listen to the general conversation of the busy and distracted townsfolk they will discover that a "Lord" has taken up the vacant post and now

dwells in the Lord's Residence, he calls himself Des Kamero Lordo (the Dark Lord). Here he plans the defence of the "free city" of Ossard from the elven forces of Wair-Rae. But with no formal forces of his own to command and with a population divided by opposing kults and afflicted by insanity such preparations are impossible.

5. In Search Of The Sword: Firstly the players need to discover the whereabouts of the sword. One way to do this is to find out exactly what happened to the Church of Baimiopia's Inquisitors and its supporting troop of Sankta Glavos knights. Discreetly asking questions, it will soon become apparent (particularly from talkative, happy drunks - followers of Rabisto, see issue 15) that Des Kamero Lordo was responsible for the demise of the punitive force from Greater Baimiopia, and that he is the likely new owner of the sword.

6. "The Elves! The Elves!": The elven fleet from Wair-Rae is spotted at noon. The news will travel like wildfire, sending people thronging to the sea walls to view the war fleet for themselves. Two hours before dusk the skies darken and storms rush out at the nearing armada. Due to dark magics, the initial landing is largely unopposed, but the kultists stir the mob and hold up the elves in the dock area overnight. It will take until dawn for the elven soldiers to break out from the area and spread across the city (with the aid of the gargoyles' Spirit Queen (issue 17). The players should be made aware that although time is running short for Ossard, they have at least until dawn to locate and enter the Lord's Residence and take the sword.

7. Taking The Sword: The Lord's Residence is a hive of futile activity. Treasures and relics are being loaded onto carts for a quick retreat. Inside the Residence, Des Kamero Lordo is making plans with Cabalists and kult leaders for a last ditch defence of the city. In the heated exchanges between the various factions blood has been drawn and the Lord is failing in his attempt to unite the many factions into a coherent and effective defence. In this atmosphere of strife and despair it should be possible for the players to gain entry to the Residence, perhaps posing as kultists.

The elven fleet, guided by skilled captains and brave sailors ran through the storm, but not without the loss of life and morale. Sickened soldiers, unused to sea travel, belched their stomachs dry while noble generals did nothing more but berate them for their weakness.

"Are you emptying your bellies to make way for Kultist swords?"

Across the assembled ships it seemed a sickness both foul and unnatural had taken root. Finally the weakened sun broke through the clouds, its bright face and feeble warmth increasing tenfold the bravado of the elves. As the first ships headed into Ossard's deserted harbour, the strange lack of resistance buoyed their spirits even more and a chorus of elven Cabalists called upon their world for aid, commanding submission.

In response the seas rose, hurrying the ships between Ossard's seaward defences, a series of abandoned sea walls, and into the disarrayed harbour. The sudden high tide flooded the docks but slowly the surging sea subsided. The elven fleet made safe harbour, the invading ships were tied to dock or anchored in deep water whilst finally the summoned winds died. Before them the city-state stood, silent and still.

Their sickness now completely forgotten the first marines landed.

Movement.

As soldiers fanned across the docks a robed figure came briefly into view and then was gone. An elven Cabalist stationed on one of the advance ships, an Illusionist, yelled a warning, his voice piercing the unnatural quiet. Then suddenly his body shook with a life of its own, splitting open, blood bursting from his sundered form. Stunned silence overcame the fleet as those on nearby ships stared in horror, the Cabalist's fellow magic-wielders making their way to examine his corpse.

On land, a marine captain ordered his troops into nearby alleys. Watching them, but unseen the robed figure witnessed the landing of more and more troops. His blood red robes scream a warning, its runes bewail coming death, his smile promises nothing but damnation.

Then he appears again, now behind the young elven captain. Warnings are yelled, the elves turn, the fleet's Cabalists start to chant, talkmans are held aloft, then their voices are stifled. The young captain turns to see the source of his fellow's fear.

A Blood Mage, a Sango Drajo lifts his palm holding a golden goblet. His red robes flutter in the gathering wind as his rich laughter rolls across the docks. Blood leaks from the captain's nose, first only a drop, then more until a steady stream fills the goblet, within seconds more blood flows from his ears and then through his clothing as his heart is drained. The Sango Drajo's manic laughter is the only sound in a deathly quiet city, until the captain falls dead and drained to the cobblestones. Sipping from his apparently bottomless goblet the Sango Drajo again disappears.

Stunned silence.

Regaining composure, the elven generals issue hurried orders to smother the rising panic; get all troops on land and make them busy. Soon, they are coursing out of the docklands, reminded of their duty to take

The Sword is locked in the Lord's study, but as they enter the chamber the players will see through the room's generous windows the stars wheeling and the moon rushing over head. The fabric of reality is so frayed, particularly with the arrival of the Spirit Queen, that the passage of time itself is faltering. Only the strong aura of faith surrounding the Sword will keep the players sane.

It will take the party until noon to collect the sword and exit the study, a time change they have witnessed through the open windows. During such time (which to them seems unaffected, just the stars, moon and sun doing strange things) the elves have fought their way out of the docks. Now the players are confronted with a true dilemma, the war for Ossard is being waged throughout the city, and they must decide if they want any part of it.

8. Escape from Ossard: The elves are almost in complete possession of the city, panic and madness grips the cityfolk as the fighting is now restricted to a systematic massacre of the Heletians. For the players to escape the city they may need to wield St. Baimio's Sword. Once outside the city, it is a long and difficult road to return the sword to the collector's agent (Achmed) awaiting them in Vangre, but Salib should be able to use his Evoran gold to buy ship's passage somewhere along the coast. [We suggest you keep your players in the area nearby Vangre for issue 22, *trust us...*].

THE SUB PLOTS

These plots are designed to enable the referee to give the impression of a city in collapse, society flayed, and morality reduced to the base level of survival of the fittest. Ossard in chaos.

1. A Miraculous Leader: When the elves enter the city, the Prison is damaged in one of the many cabalist attacks on the dockside. The prisoners escape, most scuttling away never to be seen again. But one amongst the prisoners, Bruno Colleoni, a political prisoner and one-time mercenary adventurer takes up arms, rallies the citizens of Ossard and leads a desperate counter-attack against the invaders.

Players can be involved by witnessing Bruno's stirring speech to the panicked masses in St. Alban's square, where he delivers his inspiring harangue from the dais on which the shattered statue of St. Alban once stood. Bruno calls the citizens of Ossard to arms. Screaming with a renewed strength the townsfolk turn to face the oncoming invaders, the players caught up in the mass hysteria, with weapons in hand they find themselves facing a troop of elven pikemen.

2. The Lunatic: A defaced statue of St Baimio mounted on a war stallion in a town square, outside a ruined church. Sitting astride the horse, behind St Baimio is a crazed man berating all who pass by, screaming and ranting that St Baimio has returned. He holds a sword in his hand which he swings about his head with very poor skill. He claims he has the Holy Sword of Saint Baimio. A few drunken youths who seem unconcerned by his threats are throwing stones at the lunatic.

If players can get close enough to talk to the man, by driving off the drunkards, he will just rant and rave, but may let slip that he has seen the sword of St. Baimio in the Lord's Residence.

3. Gargoyles!: The players are caught up in the general hue and cry, which is firmly focused on the death of Ossard at the hands of the invading elves, when a large crowd comes running against the flow of traffic, their eyes are wide with terror and they tell tales of massed flights of gargoyles from the north and east quarters of the city, slaughtering the populace and swooping to devour the fresh corpses.

If the players actually encounter gargoyles then they will be best served by running for cover inside a building; gargoyles attack on the wing, en masse and without mercy (see issue 17 for more on the gargoyles and Spirit Queen).

4. Death in the Skies: As the players make their way up a narrow street a dark shadow falls across the roadway sending a cold shiver down each of the players' spines (any priests or cabalists will fall to the ground until the shadow passes), before the players have time to look up and see what made the shadow. A flight of pigeons (30 or 40 of a flock) fall to the street, every one of them stone dead. A woman comes screaming from a nearby doorway, shrieking that her children are dead, struck down by magic. If the players go to investigate they see people throughout the broken down tenement have just dropped dead in their tracks, with no obvious signs of violence.

This huge power (the Spirit Queen) is flying low over the city, killing many with her intense aura. After doing several circuits (only one of which passes over the players) she will return to her hives in Kalraith (taking her gargoyles with her, the elves indebted to her).

5. The Cabalist: The players are walking Ossard's crowded streets only to discover they are being followed. As they turn to face their hunter they fall sideways being swallowed by the wall of the nearest building. The players feel disoriented as they become aware of their new surroundings. In a seemingly limitless dark, cold void. The players are greeted by a Cabalist who in this, his own realm is completely impervious to their attempts at aggression. He questions the party, "Why are they here? What are they looking for?". He, Helmur Shulggar, has been watching them and become interested in their "obvious" search. Regardless of their answers he will release them, sending the players tumbling back into the street.

Once this has happened the party will (if observant) realise that they are being followed by a black cat. The cat is one of Helmur's servants and is very agile, fleeing any attempt to capture, harm or befriend it. Only a ballistic or magical attack will be able to harm or ensnare the creature. The cat will follow the players until they leave the city, perhaps until they reach Vangre. The length of the chase is up to you, we suggest you use it to spook the players, and if they brag of how easy they got the sword have the following cat transform into Helmur; the Cabalist now wants to claim the sword for himself. Helmur Shulggar is a well accomplished Cabalist of the elemental school. He has recently taken to studying the ways of other worlds, including the realm of the dead; necromancy. If he does confront the players in an effort to claim the sword he will not fight to the death, instead he will summon an elemental. If the battle badly, Helmur will flee to fight another day.

6. Death Walks the Streets: Finally, after street after street of thronging, volatile crowds the players find themselves in a deserted and ruined road. The houses on either side of the street have been looted, the ruined buildings have debris spilling from their windows and doors, with piles of bricks and beams lying in the road. Amongst the haze of dust and smoke from still smouldering fires is the stench of the freshly dead. Here amongst the corpses walks a large black robed figure. Be very, very quiet.

Death in Unae is only ever seen by those she comes to claim or those who are blessed by the gods (the divine wanting their chosen to be aware of the true nature of the world, seeing is believing). She is a skeletal figure of about six foot in height. While she seems to be of slender and subtle bones she is shrouded in ruined black silks, and has two large wings that she can and will use to fly with. Death is unbeatable in combat, anyone who enters such a contest will seem to others to be fighting shadows, in time such a combatant will only do themselves an injury, usually fatal...

Important Note: Referees must be careful how they use this sub plot. Any direct confrontation with Death will result in player character death (naturally). Hopefully your players are wise enough to flee such things.

7. Kultists: This sub plot should be used repeatedly throughout the Ossard adventure as the kults now represent the only organised (and we use the term loosely) force in the city-state aside from the elven invaders and the Cabal.

The players will be repeatedly hassled by kultists, whether it is by a blood thirsty Kavist who "doesn't like the way a player looks at him" or a follower of Mortigi who is out for some sport. As long as the players use their wits, and try and keep out of combat when large number of kultists are around they should be okay. The important thing here is to bring home to the players that the kults are running the show in Ossard, and it seems just about everyone in the city-state has taken up one of the dozens of faiths on offer.

In issue 15 we detailed the more common kults, several others have been printed since then. Find below the names, basis of worship and main enemies of these alternative faiths.

Issue	Kult Name	Sphere & basis of faith
15	Kult of Mortigi	God of murder & assassins
15	Rabisto	Saint of bandits
15	Avida	God of the wealthy
15	Sango Drajo	Blood mages (Cabalists)
15	Malsano	Callers of. God of mercy
15	The Stellisto	God of thieves
15	Kult of Battle	Kave, god of battle
15	Tergaia	The kult of Patrino (druidic)
18	Markosa	Greedy servants of chaos
19	The Feral Kult	Followers of Bamorrah

8. A Noblewoman in Distress: A manservant in fine livery approaches the players to enter his mistress's house and help bear her out on a carry chair, to defend her personage, her baggage and carry her to safety. The woman is Marie Salroy, Dowager Princess, formerly one of the ruling regime in Ossard and now reduced to semi-poverty, but still having enough of the family fortune to pay her rescuers a handsome dividend.



9. No Escape: A gang of low lives are holding one of the landward gates in the south-east of the city. They are preying on the fear and panic of the fleeing citizens of dying Ossard by only allowing out to safety those with florins to pay the 20 coin toll. This group of mongrel desperadoes and tavern scum are accumulating a large booty of trade items, household treasures, fine gowns, and other goods which they have heaped in a great pile outside a nearby tavern.

Inside the tavern the uncouth leader of the gang, Antonio Capparo, is holding court, a pretty wench on his knee, a tankard in his hand and a great sword in scabbard beside him. Antonio has no truck with kults, or such like; he is only interested in lining his pockets. He has runners in the streets keeping a track of the elves' progress and has already organised transport (purloined wagons and horses) for a quick getaway when the invasion comes too close. Players will have to pass through one of his gates to escape themselves. Antonio will negotiate the deal himself, and an ornate and obviously valuable sword like St Baimio's may well be his asking price for safe exit.

10. Random Encounters On Ossard's Streets

Roll	Encounter
01-10	Rat Swarm: 20d10 rats rush from sewer.
11-15	Lone wounded gargoyle on pavement.
16-20	2d12 Mounted Elvish knights.
21-30	1d6 Zombies: Slain Mortigi kult coven has risen up to complete its "life's work."
31-40	Lynch Mob: 3d12 crazed citizens mistake a player as rapist/murderer.
41-50	Press Gang: Militia captain and 2d6 guards press party into city defence duty.
51-60	Harlot: Some days are bad for business, but hey, a girl's gotta pay the bills somehow!
61-70	Pickpocket: In the press of the crowd, a minor item goes missing.
71-80	Wrong Way, Turn Back: Party run into d3 x 10 Elvish Footmen backed by a Mage.
81-90	Duck!: Falling masonry lands on party.
91-99	Loathsome Creature: The most perverted, extreme creature the referee can create just crept onto the street, hunting flesh.
00	Time Warp: Party are 'held' in magical stasis for 1d6 hours

the city for the glory of Walr-Rae and to rid it of foul kultists. Slowly the eerie silence lifts, sounds of the city rise, the noise of angry crowds, as the promise of battle draws closer.

The mobs appear amidst the orderly elven advance. Instead of securing a front, the elves find that they are being attacked from within, where once there was no one, now stands the enemy revealed; a mighty veil had concealed them. Most of the attackers are poorly equipped Heletian city folk, including women and children. But they fight like devils.

Amidst the bloody chaos, the elves meet some knots of determined resistance, groups of trained fighters, Kavists, followers of the kult of battle. Such warriors, inspired by their desire to please Kave, and their need to defend their homes cause havoc. The bulk of the humans merely slow the elves progress, in time the soldiers establish a perimeter and the kultists are driven outside the dock districts. It takes but a few hours before the disorganised human forces melt away, leaving piles of dead behind them. The elvish generals come ashore to make further plans.

As dusk approaches a rhythmic drum beat echoes across the city. Within minutes it is drowned out by a dozen different chants. For one final moment the sun breaks through the clouded sky to display an eerie sunset, only to be replaced by a shadow darker than that of any natural nightfall.

The elves shiver, the Kavists whimper like babes and the black robed assassins of the Kult of Mortigi howl their glee as the god of murder blesses his excited flock.

"There are so many gods at play this day!" an elven voice cracks as sanity flees its pathetic flesh and bone shell. Others of a deeply spiritual nature shiver, many collapse.

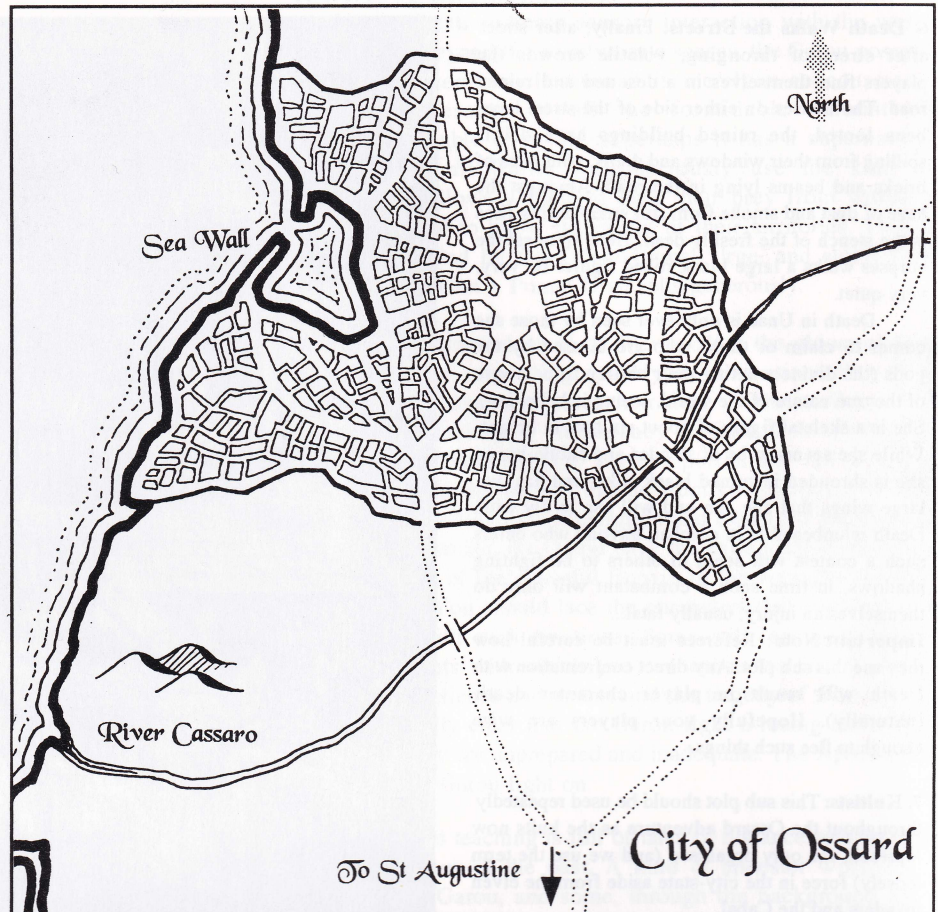
Above, the divine gather to claim the souls of those fallen, but the days battle is not yet finished. With the tolling of bells across the city the followers of Mortigi move like shadows through dark alleys and into the sewers, heading for the docks.

Overhead, a terrible divine incarnation glides, her massive wings guiding her black-as-coal bulk like a wraith over the city. On her back rides a lone elf, Forwao. As the Spirit Queen passes overhead people die below, their souls claimed. It is the Spirit Queen of the gargoyles, and the elves cheer for their sister's aid.

But Mortigi will not be beaten so easily. The moon and stars fade from view as the Murderous One brings down his curse, marking those that displease him.

Before dawn many will die, but the battle for Ossard will continue. Eventually the city will be in the elves hands, a new port to join Serhaem in King Caemarou's plans for the Heletian homelands. But while Ossard may have been won, it is only one battle in a long, long war.

Ossard has murdered peace in Unae.
None shall be safe.



THE CITY OF OSSARD

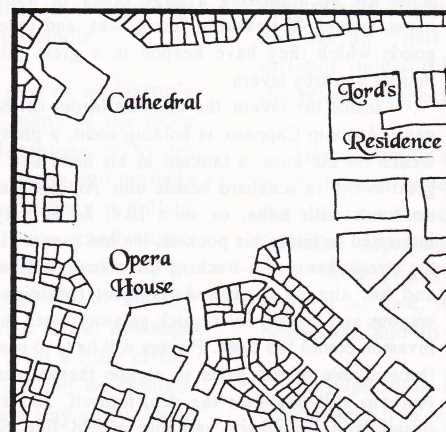
Ossard was once a city of importance, the last major Heletian port in Dormetia for outward bound traders heading for the new markets; the Middle, the Prabeq and the Eastern nations.

For this adventure, however, there's no point in detailing the city-state's past, for its Heletian history ends here. The elves will win the city within three days. Below are details on specific locations that are relevant to the scenario plot and sub plots:

The Docklands

The Docklands is an area of huge wooden warehouses and taverns. For the majority of the adventure the elven forces will be using this as a base shortly after taking the harbour.

The Market Square



This large open area was once the heart of the city; today it is no longer used for buying and selling, instead it is a site of ritual and feuding. Across the square are scattered crowds, fights, bodies, bonfires and more. This is the heart of the chaotic city that Ossard has become. Facing the square on one side is the **Ruined Cathedral**, a burnt out shell; thoroughly looted it now holds only ashes and the ghosts of the priests and nuns who tended this now desecrated place. Any who enter the temple and try to sincerely placate the ghosts by offering something similar to the Church of Baimiopia's burial rites will be blessed.

The Lord's Residence (The Malnobla)

The Malnobla has a very impressive three floor frontage facing onto the Market Square. Here unruly mobs fight as the warring kults feud over the superiority of differing gods. The square is lined with the heaped bodies of the dead, and the Malnobla is no different with its interior cloaked with the stench of the blood.

The building is simple in design; constructed from wood and stone, and roofed with slate. Inside the furnishings and decorations declare the owner's wealth without being overly ostentatious. On the ground floor are functional and public rooms such as the stables, kitchens, store rooms, a reception hall and lounge, the second floor is made up of offices, the study, library, a balcony and sitting room while the more private chambers and guest rooms are to be found on the third floor.

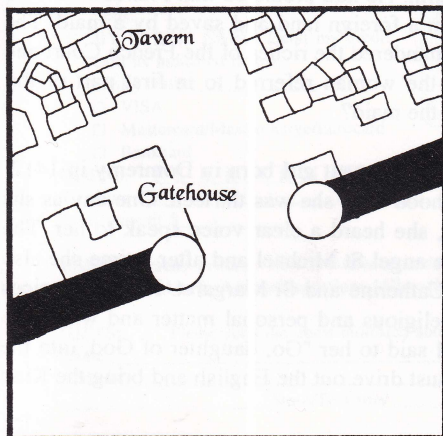
The Opera House

This bulky structure was once the place to be seen for the elite of Ossard's population. Today it

It is 515EK, it is late Winter ☉

is host to only a parody of dramas and skits that are played out on its stage. To a rowdy audience of "energetic" theatre goers the actors tackle a whole range of topics with enormous gusto, using a trio of cabalists for special effects. An assortment of the old nobility has remained seated there for *months* (being nailed to their seats). Currently the actors most popular play is the retelling of how the Lord cast his mighty spells on the invading force of inquisitors from Greater Baimiopia with the aid of his Cabalists. Included in this play is the acquisition of the Holy Sword, and how it is now coveted by the Lord in his residence (in his study).

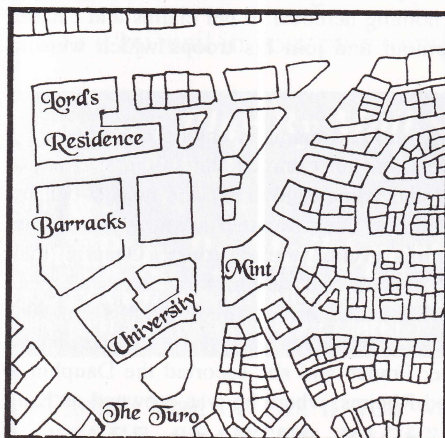
One of the City Gates



Sewers

Underneath Ossard runs a tangled network of tunnels that drain away the waste of the city to the sea. While the minor tunnels are only two feet across, the major tunnels are often as much as two yards in height and width. Many kults used the sewers to hide their activities prior to the death of Ossard, particularly the Kult of Mortigi. These kultists carved out hidden dens and chapels with secret exits onto the streets and up into some of the taverns and warehouses in the docklands area.

The Lord's District

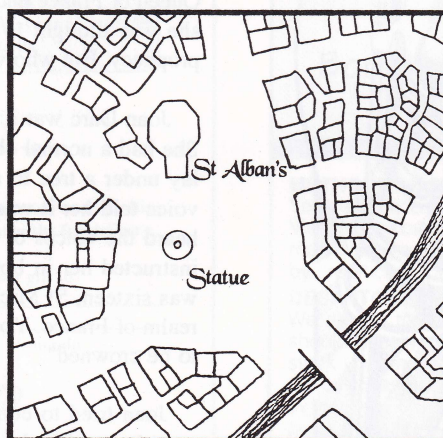


This area contains the ruined remains of Ossard's only (and small) university, mint (well and truly looted), merchant's guild, armoury and a number of other civic establishments. Mobs have long since gone over the district, destroying the many civic buildings and killing the employees, particularly the city militia.

The Turo

This simple but ugly and defensible tower stands seven floors high atop a small rise within the Lord's District. Once part of a greater citadel, it now stands alone and until recently served as a combination of barracks for the city militia and Ossard's only prison. In centuries past the Turo was the base of government when long ago the more repressive and despised lords of the city-state ruled from behind stone walls. Today the Turo is no longer even an effective prison, with the militia deserted or killed and several of its cells broken open. Beneath, in the lowliest dungeons many of its inmates are now starving to death, forgotten by the city residents and abandoned by their guards.

St Alban's Square



This small square has over the years become a second market square, but now in the face of the new Ossard is little more than a place of drunks and Cabalist duels. The square has at its centre, a statue of St Alban, patron saint of scholars. Facing the square is the Church of St Alban, which, like every other Baimiopian church in the city, has been gutted by fire.

PERSONALITIES OF OSSARD

Des Kamero Lordo is a mysterious man with a strong character. While little is known of him prior to his arrival in the city-state, days after the kults' rise he was quick to assume ownership of the Lord's residence and claim control over the city. Using the aid of a dozen powerful and willing cabalists he has been able to hold sway.

Seig Maneim is the leading priest of the Kult of Kave; he is a thirty year old Flet, and a skilled fighter. Currently he holds a tentative truce with the Kult of Mortigi but this is constantly being broken by individual followers of both sides.

Saf Balnai is also known as *Lady Death*, she is a thirty-five year old Heletian lady who is currently the highest ranking priest(ess) in the city-state. It was through her efforts that a truce was negotiated with the Kult of Kave, she wanting the feud to hold off until after the mutual enemy, the elves were dealt with. Saf Balnai is a highly skilled assassin. She often spends her nights haunting the alleys of the city, seeking lonely victims and making offerings to her god, Mortigi.

Prince Dalsior is the second born son of High King Caemarou and is here leading the elven forces. He will be governing the city when it is taken and is already making his plans with his own cabalist for the reconstruction of the city.

OSSARD's FUTURE

The elves will raze the city, killing any who do not flee. Within a week they will have raised with aid of Elementalists of the Cabal several towers in the style of the Pillar-Cities back in Wair-Rae. These huge marble towers will form the centre of the new city, an elven city to be known as Lae Ossard. With the removal of the chaotic situation of a thousands off worshippers offering praise to dozens of opposing gods the divine focus will fade. In the coming months, as elven artisans, soldiers and settlers arrive, the fabric of reality will completely stabilise, to become one controlled by the five churches of Wair-Rae.

THE HOLY SWORD

The Holy Sword of St Baimio is the most powerful artifact known to the Church of Baimiopia. The beautifully finished ornate sword is made from fine Turaso Rose Steel (issue 13) and is of a blessed nature. Any wielder of the sword who is also of the faith of Kreinta will receive a +4/+20% bonus in combat. Such a blessing will only be offered to those of the faith, and those who use the sword for the greater good. The sword also defends a wielder strong in the faith of Kreinta with an *aura of safety* - protecting against the warping effects of Cabalist spells. ☉





heroic women

by Tonia Walden & Louise Parker

Joan of Arc (1412-1431)

"You Englishmen, who have no right in this Kingdom of France, the King of Heaven orders and commands you through me, Joan the Maid, that you quit your fortresses and return into your own country - or if not, I shall make such mayhem that the memory of it shall be perpetual."

France was at a low point of history at the beginning of the 15th century. The English held most of the country and after the death of the King of France they declared the infant King Henry VI, to be the king of both France and England. The people of France were despondent and rumours began to spread about a prophecy made by the wizard Merlin. He had predicted that France would be ruined by a woman from a foreign land and saved by a maid. The Queen of France had squandered the riches of the French Court and she was thought to be the woman referred to in first part of the prophecy. But who was the maid?

Joan Darc was a French peasant girl born in Domremy in 1412. She had a normal childhood until she was thirteen. One day as she lay under a tree to rest, she heard a clear voice speak to her. The voice told her it was the angel St Michael and after a time she also heard the voices of St Catherine and St Margaret. Her holy voices instructed her in both religious and personal matter and when she was sixteen, St Michael said to her "Go, daughter of God, into the realm of France. You must drive out the English and bring the King to be crowned".

Joan tried to convince the local lord, Robert de Baudricourt, to send her to Charles the Dauphin, (the rightful heir to the crown of France), so that she could help lead France to victory, as she came "on behalf of the King of Heaven to raise the siege of Orleans". She was at first sent home, but on the advice of her voices, she was so returned and was so persistent that she began to gain followers and eventually de Baudricourt gave her permission. When word of a peasant girl making such extravagant claims reached Charles, he was intrigued and sent for her. He tested her by dressing as a commoner and having another pose as the Dauphin, but she was not fooled by the impostor when she came to court. She convinced him that she was sincere, but before she could be allowed to proceed she had to undergo an investigation by the Church. It finally found there was nothing heretical in her claims and Charles allowed Joan to don armour and join his troops which were to liberate Orleans.

Joan forbade swearing and bad manners among her troops, got rid of the camp followers and encouraged the soldiers to attend mass every day. The soldiers came to love her and respect her, but the other commanders did not. They resented a young peasant girl with no military training giving them orders. Despite their opposition, she led the attack and within three days she had captured the city of Orleans and driven the English from their seven forts around the city. Her battles against the English, halted their attempts to conquer France and she escorted the Dauphin to conquer enemy occupied Rheims, where he was crowned as King Charles VII of France.

Joan was in favour of quick attack of Paris, but Charles VII grew dissatisfied with her desire to liberate all of France. His advisers, who despised her, cautioned him against letting her make decisions in military matters. By this time, France had made peace treaties with Burgundy and England and Joan threatened to break them, as her voices insisted that she continue on her crusades against English infiltration. The King split up her loyal knights

and his troops sabotaged her campaigns, so that she was without support when she fought against the English and the French lord of Burgundy (who did not recognise the claim of Charles VII to be the King). She was captured at Paris in May in 1430, as her voices had told her she would be, by Burgundian troops when the drawbridge of the city of Compiègne was raised before she could safely retreat.

Despite entreaties from many people that Charles VII should pay her ransom, he ignored her. She made one desperate escape attempt, by jumping from her prison window, but it was unsuccessful. The English paid her ransom instead and gave her to be tried as a heretic by the Church. She was accused by the Church of crimes including witchcraft, heresy and murder, which they found difficult to prove and she refused to admit to. However, they could show that she refused to accept their authority, as she claimed her voices came from God and that He was a higher authority than they were.

Throughout her battles she had worn male attire and it was because of this that the Church accused her of a crime against God. For a month they sought to have her recant her behaviour and admit her guilt, but even under threat of torture she remained firm and she was finally condemned to be burned at the stake. The threat of being burned was more than she could bear and she agreed to recant her sins and put aside her masculine clothes. She was sentenced to life imprisonment, but to her horror she was not to be held as a prisoner of the Church, as she should have been, but was returned to the English prison that she had been kept in throughout the trial.

Facing a lifetime of imprisonment and abuse, Joan overcame her fear of being burned alive. She decided to be true to her voices and to her beliefs and put back on her battle dress. She was condemned at once as a relapsed heretic and burned at the stake two days later. At only nineteen, she died calling on Jesus and her saints. Twenty five years later the King, Charles VII, had her retried and she was found innocent and in 1920 the Church finally recognised her as a saint and she was made the second patron saint of France.

Character Profile

Joan was a young woman about nineteen years of age, fairly unremarkable in appearance, but with remarkable strength of will. This was shown when she was felled by an arrow during battle, and instead of retiring, she picked up her banner and continued to inspire her troops.

Joan was said to display skill on horseback and carried forth her personal standard which consisted of a holy inscription and the French national emblem the Fleur-de-lys (lily flower). She also carried the blessed sword of St Catherine. Although she led her troops with fierce determination and courage, Joan swore that she herself had refrained from taking human life.

She had the ability to inspire loyalty and courage from those around her and her rallying cries during battle, and her intelligent and pious testimony during her trial showed she had wit and oratory skills. Her religious convictions were unshakeable and she was capable of convincing others of the truth that came from her "voices".

Role Playing Applications

These simple adventure hooks for using Joan of Arc in your games are good for any medieval fantasy based adventure. They'll work best in an area of your campaign where a feudal monarchy is under pressure from outside forces similar to those that led to the real history events.

The Holy Visionary

The player characters are in service to a noble; Joan's initial attempts to gain support and an audience with the Dauphin can be used as the basis for an adventure. In a time of civil unrest, the characters find an earnest young peasant girl entreating their lord for support in her holy quest (she has had visions from angels that she can aid the King in his crusades). The characters are assigned by their lord to escort her to the King of the realm. While the characters may not take her vision seriously, others will and spies for the enemies of the King are everywhere. If the group are indiscrete they will be attacked by those seeking to stop the girl's visions coming true. Joan was never shy about telling people about "her" voices but she wasn't foolish enough to think that everyone was her friend and it shouldn't be forgotten that she can handle herself in a fight. If they get her to the King, their task may be ended or they could choose to continue on, and fight by her side. Of course, if they are unsuccessful, Joan's visions will end with her throat cut in a ditch....

The Wrong Place At The Wrong Time

It can happen to anyone and it would be all too easy for a group of adventurers to get caught in a town just as it was besieged by an enemy army. There's not a lot to do when a town is under provisioned and under protected except wait for help and watch the food supplies dwindle. A small army led by a "mere slip of a girl" may not offer much hope to the characters, even if it is rumoured that she is a holy woman who speaks to angels. The characters can hear gossip and rumours of Joan and the outside armies, until the time comes for her army to attack and lift the siege, when the characters and other townsfolk can fight by her side.

A Daring Rescue

Joan's supporters did not save her once she had been taken prisoner. However, rescuing her from the tower where she was held during her trial would pose a worthy task for any characters who had met her previously, or who were hired for the purpose by a noble supporter of her cause. She was held in enemy territory, so a covert operation would be called for rather than a full frontal assault. She was held in isolation with soldiers as guards, but the number would not have been great, for in reality the authorities could not spare a lot of men to guard one prisoner, no matter how important she was.

Mystical Visions

In any campaign setting, including modern day, Joan could appear to a character in a vision, just as her saints appeared to her. This could be appropriate if one of the characters was highly religious or a mystic and could be used where the gamemaster is looking for incentive to prompt the characters towards a plot - such as freeing someone held unjustly, whose freedom will make a change for the better.

Boudicca (dAD61)

"Better masterless poverty than prosperous slavery. The Romans are hares and foxes trying to rule over dogs and wolves!"

Boudicca lived in the times when most of Britain had been conquered by the armies of the Roman Empire. The British Celts had been divided by wars amongst themselves and their hillforts fell one by one to the relentless Roman Legions, with many tribes surrendering to the conquerors. Although many kings still ruled in name over their tribes, they were actually answerable to Roman governors. This was the case with the tribe of the Iceni, who resided in what is now Norfolk, England. Their leader Prasutagus, (whose wife was Boudicca), in an attempt to protect his family after his death, willed half his territories to his daughters and the rest to the Roman Emperor Nero. He thought that this show of respect to the Emperor would allow his family to keep some of their land but unfortunately the Roman's Governor, Suetonius Paullinus, allowed his subordinates to exhort and persecute the natives, while he concentrated his efforts in military matters. After Prasutagus' death the Romans took little notice of his will and moved immediately to the Iceni's land, where they imposed martial law and seized their property and money.

Queen Boudicca was the heir to the leadership of the Iceni; Celtic women enjoyed similar rights to men and so she was able to rule in her own right. She would not give in to the Romans and for her resistance, she was flogged and her daughters were raped. After this outrage, Boudicca broke into revolt and set about raising an army from the many tribes of Britain, to attack the Roman conquerors. The depth of hatred the Celts felt against the invaders meant many other tribes joined the rebel tribe. She addressed her army in a fiery speech and inspired them to attack the Roman city of Camulodunum. More troops joined her army on the way there and by the time they reached the city, there were said to be about a hundred thousand British warriors and their families. After two days the city was taken and the destruction was absolute - the buildings were destroyed and burned and the entire population was killed. The army then continued on towards Londinium (London) which faced the same fate. This attack took the Roman Governor, whose armies were currently in North Wales, completely by surprise and he could do nothing to stop the destruction. Boudicca's army moved towards Verulanium which was also razed.

For a few months Boudicca posed the greatest threat to Roman occupation of Britain. The Roman Governor, however, eventually manoeuvred his troops towards Boudicca's and his army joined with the main Roman army in an effort to destroy the rebels. Somewhere in the Midlands the two armies met. Boudicca's troops were not as well organised as the Legions and they were weary from battle. The extremely effective Roman tactics allowed Paullinus to destroy the entire British force in one battle, with only the loss of four hundred Roman soldiers. Recognising she had lost and rather than face the humiliation of execution by the Romans, Boudicca fled to her home town where she committed suicide by drinking poison. But her efforts were not all in vain as Paullinus was relieved of his position as Governor, and for a short time she had angrily challenged the might of the Roman Empire.



Character Profile

Boudicca was described as an imposing figure, "terrifying of aspect" being tall, with a harsh voice and a fierce glance in her eye. Her mass of red hair reached to her knees and she dressed in a tunic of many colours, with a cloak clasped with an ornate brooch. She probably would have used the weapons of spear and long sword which were favoured by the Celts. Boudicca was a proficient charioteer and during the battles between the Romans and Celts, she was said to have driven her chariot around her troops, shouting inspiration at them. Her determination to stop the oppression of her tribe and country was her overriding goal.

Role Playing Applications

The Barbarian Tribe

The players encounter the Iceni led by Boudicca. This may be a charmingly rustic encounter, as the Celts were renowned for their hospitality, or it may be a case of "are you with us or against us" as the players are caught up in the uprising. The characters will have to escape or else be fight in a battle they can't win. This could cause a conflict for honourable characters who don't wish to run from a battle, (even if it isn't one of their own), and abject terror for snivelling cowards who don't want to die.

Insurrection!

The characters are hired by a lord whose lands border the barbarian wastes. He suspects that the barbarian tribes may be stirring and wants the characters to find out whether there is any truth behind the rumours and if so, the strength of their army. If caught as spies, the Iceni will kill the characters, but if they uncover the truth of the ruthless way in which the lord acquired his land players may want to reconsider their loyalties. The data they could give Boudicca about the lord's armies, may be enough to sway the battle in the barbarian's favour.

Players Save The Queen

After her husband's death, Boudicca is advised by her Druid to travel to a distant shrine to seek guidance for her tribe. On the way her retinue is attacked by bandits. The characters should come across this scene and if they go to the assistance of the Iceni Queen, the bandits can be fought off. Boudicca will thank them and offer them payment if they would accompany her, in the place of those guards who were killed. At the shrine Boudicca will be informed she is to lead her tribe in a mighty battle. Even if the players do not accompany her, she will give them a brooch which shows they are her friends.

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MAGIC

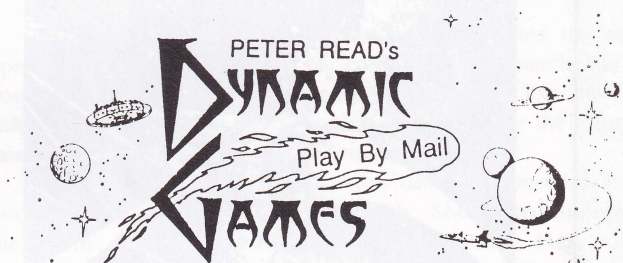
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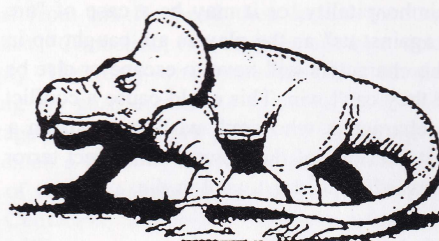
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What To Pack In Your Backpack

Tips On How Best To Spend Your Gee-Pees

by Liam Kenyon

"Look," Wilson, the thin mage, slurred, "I can't stand it any more, I've got to ask; what the heck is that sticking out of your backpack?"

The addresses cleric, Abel Zeek, puffed his cheeks haughtily. "It's a ten foot pole, what does it look like?"

The party, (except for Virgil the Paladin, laughter is the hiding place of fools!") fell about laughing hysterically.

"What's it for? asked Shana the Elf, wiping the tears from her almond-shaped eyes, "Baton twirling!"

"Well there must be a use for it, or else He wouldn't have chosen it for me to carry, would He!?"

This amusing anecdote from an early episode of *The Adventures of the A-Team* (issue 7) actually happened in a role-playing session. The player in question had been told his recently created character had an allotment of gold to spend on anything in the rulebook's equipment list. The ten-foot pole was not the only thing the party discovered he had hidden in his backpack, when the first water-flooded tunnel was discovered, he promptly produced a brand spanking new row boat!

While most role playing game rulebooks cover the basics of character generation admirably, there are always one or two areas that seem to be glossed over. This "how to" article seeks to address one of those common oversights - the selection and purchase of the equipment that a fantasy role playing character might need.

As well as providing some useful information for new and inexperienced players, the article has also been written for those "veteran" players who might have always purchased what could now be called "standard" items, but who never really thought about why those purchases were made, or how this equipment could be put to better use.

The Basics

The number and type of items that a group of characters has to buy before beginning their adventuring careers can be affected by a variety of factors. Initial funds allocation, the location/type of adventure being played (ie city, dungeon or wilderness), the size of the group, how the group is made up, character backgrounds and the generosity of the referee can all have a major role to play in this decision. For example, a generous referee might allow each of the players to begin play with a basic weapon, clothing, food, some tools of trade and a few mundane adventuring items, removing the need to purchase these items.

When I began role playing, I was lucky that I joined an experienced group of players, who were quite happy to explain to me the in and outs of my initial equipment purchases. We also had a referee who was a stickler for accuracy, which forced us to use each piece of equipment properly, so that each purchase I made had to be of real use to the character I had created. As not every referee is a realism freak, or even overly generous, the information in this article is provided with the following assumptions:



- The characters are beginning the game with nothing, apart from the clothes on their backs and their tools of trade.

- All the basic items mentioned below should be available for purchase by the characters, regardless of system or setting.

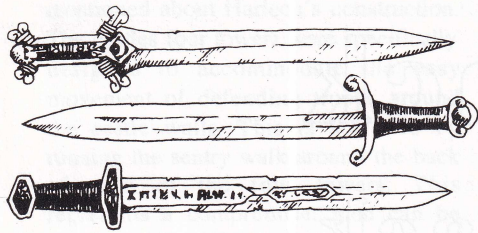
- The referee and the players are happy to strive for some small measure of realism with regards to combat, encumbrance, fatigue and the performance of tasks.

Pooling Resources

The first rule of common sense dictates that once each player has received his initial allocation of money, it is in the best interests of the group as a whole to pool those funds before buying anything, regardless of how desirable it might be to buy that special something for a specific character's use. The survival of the group at the early stages of it's adventuring career will often depend on each character being able to do her best, so it would be ridiculous to allow "rich" player characters to wander around fully armed and armoured, while everyone else tries to make do with nothing. Good role playing is about mutual support and co-operation, not personal power.

Once the money has been pooled, immediately take 10% of the total and put it aside for day to day expenses. Any referee worth her salt will make sure that the players are frequently charged for accommodation, meals, miscellaneous fares, bribes and other sundry purchases, so players need to ensure that such funds are available. The remaining funds can now be spent. I would suggest that this order be used for those purchases:

1. Melee weapons.
2. Distance weapons.
3. Shields.
4. Miscellaneous purchases.
5. Armour.



Weapons

Let's be brutally obvious here. At least at the beginning stage of a character's career, fantasy role playing is largely about bashing heads in - do unto others before they do unto you. I don't think that I would have any arguments about a melee weapon being the first choice for a character to purchase, but players should still be practical. Only buy one melee weapon per character at this stage, unless the group is flushed with cash, and even then, that second weapon should be some form of distance weapon (see below).

Nearly all melee weapons should be within the budget of most beginning characters, as long as you don't get too fancy. If your group of adventurers has very little in the way of cash, only buy manufactured weapons for those who can put them to best use - your warriors. For the rest of the characters, you might try initially equipping them with some of the "domestic versions" of the weapons generally available to characters, at least until you obtain more funds, or manage to "liberate" weapons from defeated foes. Clubs, quarterstaves, hatchets, large kitchen knives and farm tools can all be quite deadly (go and check out some of the tools in your garden shed - imagine getting whacked by a mattock or a sledge-hammer!), although they should probably have to make some form of "survival throw" each time they are used in combat, or else break.

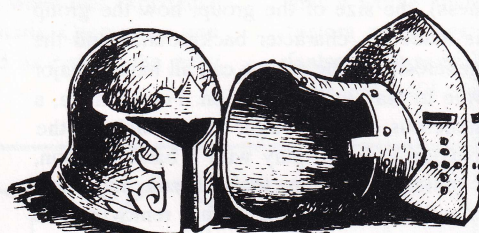
The second most essential purchase should be some form of ranged weapon, be it a hand thrown weapon, a sling or a bow of some kind. The premise is simple, you don't need armour if your enemy never gets close enough to melee with you. Even if you don't kill your opponent outright, causing enough damage from missile weapons will greatly improve the odds in your group's favour. The English peasant armies at Agincourt, armed with a long bow and a "coup-de-grace" dagger, helped wipe out thousands of fully armoured French Knights.

If you have the funds, buy a distance weapon for every character, preferably the best bows you can afford. If your funds are limited, buy one ranged weapon for every two or three characters; at least a sling, if nothing else (if stones are available, you never have to worry about buying

ammunition). If you can't afford to buy any distance weapons, never, repeat never, venture out into the wilderness until you have purchased some - a flying creature could decimate a melee-weapon-only equipped party with ease, having nothing to fear other than spells.

Shields and Helms

Now the time has come to begin protecting your character. The choice of armour is largely determined by the combat system your particular role playing system employs. For the most part though, each role playing game usually allows an increase in armour class, or defence rating, by the use of a shield. And because shields cost less than a suit of anything greater than leather armour, they provide a cheap but effective way of improving protection. The amount of cover a shield provides, in gaming terms, may or may not be affected by the size of the shield, but usually raises the defence rating of the character by at least 10%.



If the particular combat system you use allows partial, or piecemeal armour (ie allowing you to protect specific portions of your anatomy), the next purchase should be a helm of some sort. This way, the shield can be left to protect the body, while a helmet covers the head. Full helms offer great protection, but are next to useless in a dungeon, the extra protection more than offset by the decrease in vision and hearing. If your game system allows it, a "Roman" or "Corinthian" helm is probably the best choice, as it offers full protection for the top and sides of the head, but allows far better vision while partially protecting the face.

Similarly, you might wish to purchase some piecemeal armour for your neck (gorget), non-shield arm (vambrace) and lower legs (greaves). This will provide some reasonable level of protection for a much lower cost than a full suit of armour. But remember, if funds are limited, do not buy any armour (apart from a shield and helm) until you have made your miscellaneous purchases. Once all of your miscellaneous equipment purchases have been made, then use the rest of your available funds to buy as much armour as you can afford, even before you buy a second weapon for any character.

Miscellaneous Equipment

It's easy to become overawed by the lists of miscellaneous goodies presented in rule books for you to purchase. It's also easy to forget to buy these items altogether, players preferring instead to stack their characters with weapons and armour. It's only when they come to their first dungeon or cliff face and somebody asks "Did anyone bring any rope/torches/food?" that everyone suddenly realises their mistake (don't laugh - I've seen it happen many a time).

Listed below are what I consider to be some of the more essential items that deserve to find a place in your groups' backpacks. In each case, I have specified whether the item should be purchased for each character, or purchased as a group item, to be carried by one individual, but used by the whole party.

Rope - an essential purchase. British paratroopers in World War II sometimes used to each carry a length of what was known as "toggle rope". Toggle rope was a length of rope which had a small loop at one end and a piece of dowel at the other (like the buttons you find on some duffel coats), the idea being that you could join the many pieces of rope together to form a much longer rope. As well as providing a variety of uses, this also removed the need for one or two men to have to carry great lengths of rope, which can be a great weight by itself.

I would also suggest that climbing rope be knotted at two foot intervals, to make climbing easier. I know that player characters climb up and down ropes all the time, but any referee who doesn't ask weaker characters to at least make an agility roll when climbing more than 20' should really think about it. Players advising their referee that they were using a knotted climbing rope when making their way down into the inky blackness should then remove the need for such an agility roll.

My suggestion for purchasing ropes is that one or two of the strongest characters each carry 50' of unknotted rope, while every other character carries 10' to 20' of knotted toggle rope. One grappling hook for each party should be sufficient, but a spare probably wouldn't hurt.

Mallet and Iron Spikes - these have a multitude of uses. Doors and sliding panels can be spiked open, ropes can be secured before climbing down into dungeons, iron spikes can be used to set off some magnetic or electrical traps, and creatures can be whacked on the head with the mallet (or in the chest with a wooden stake). Take two mallets and two dozen spikes for each six member party.

Flasks of Oil - wonderful stuff, the fantasy gamer's thermo-nuclear device. Forget about using this stuff in lamps or

lanterns (admittedly it's principal purpose), join two flasks together, add a simple fuse from cloth or rope, and make an oil bomb. The advantage of burning oil is that it spreads, making it great for blocking passages, setting fire to barricades or covering a host of tightly packed creatures. Until you have access to something like a fireball spell, you can never have enough oil bombs. In one fantasy campaign, our group of adventurers nearly burned down an entire fort with only a few well placed oil bombs - unfortunately, it was our fort. Buy about four flasks of oil for every character.

Writing Materials - whether it be paper, papyrus or parchment, no group of players should be shown, or allowed to draw and keep a map unless one of the characters has specified that she has purchased the means to record such information. Apart from the obvious map-making and message-passing uses, paper can also be used to make rubbings (with pencil or charcoal) of symbols on walls or floors for later analysis, to collect and transfer powders, to slide under doors to catch falling keys (an old trick which still works sometimes), or even to make a crude, short-term fuse. I would suggest that any character who can read and write should probably have their own small supply of paper and writing utensils, but one set per group will suffice.

Mirror - you may wonder why anyone would want to purchase a mirror, be it small, silver or otherwise. Well, how about using it as a heliograph? (ie sending signals by flashing the rays of the sun) - great in the wilderness. Why not use it to look around corners in dungeons, or to check out the ceiling of a building through a window before entering? How are you ever going to reflect the gaze of a medusa without a mirror? I once even saw a group of players have their characters set up a series of mirrors to reflect sunlight down into a tomb to give a vampire a hard time (they managed to make the referee overlook that fact that it's supposed to be direct sunlight). I would suggest a mirror for every second character if you can afford it, but at least two for each group, so that you can signal to each other if you split up in the wilderness.

Cloak - another greatly under utilised item. Apart from keeping your character dry and warm, what about some of these alternate uses? Try using your cloak as an impromptu rope, carry bag, net, snare, awning or slime/acid/fire cover or bridge. A cloak can be torn into smaller pieces and used as bandages or fuses, or left whole and used as a makeshift stretcher. How about soaking the cloak in oil, lighting it, and using it as a weapon? ("Run away - he's got a flaming cloak!!!"). Every character should probably purchase at least a simple cloak, especially if travelling in the wilderness.

Backpack - each character needs a waterproof leather backpack for storing the bulky and infrequently used items, and belt pouches for those characters that also need quick access to certain smaller items (scrolls, lock picks, spell components, mirrors, compass, ink etc). Make sure that the backpacks are well packed and insulated (ie breakable objects are wrapped in padding), for you can be sure that your character will at some stage fall from a great height into a deep body of water, before getting blasted by a huge gout of flame (it's fantasy role playing remember).

Common straw makes an excellent padding material for your backpack. While it's flammable unless green, it's also very light. Straw also has a number of other uses - to draw up liquids, and to distribute powders (eg you could blow sleeping powder through a guardroom keyhole).



Basic Needs Stuff - we're talking cooking equipment (one set per group), sleeping bag/mat (each character), water skins/bottles (at least one each, depending on the location of the adventure), rations (iron, standard or otherwise), a compass or lodestone (at least one per group), and a whetstone (for keeping weapons nice and sharp - one per group).

Exotics - these are items, the purchase of which is determined either by the type and source of your adventure setting, or some brilliant spark of insight. Once again, many of the following suggested items have a number of alternate uses.

If undead are to be found around every corner, then you are going to need holy water (divine napalm), a religious symbol of some kind (but only usable if your character has sufficient faith to make it work properly), salt (for placing in the mouth of a vampire's severed head to prevent resurrection), chalk (for drawing circles and wards of protection, as well as marking your way through a dungeon maze), and candles (an important component in many exorcism rituals, as well as a backup light source and excellent impromptu fuse).

If your campaign is town based, you know that you're going to have to watch out for thieves that steal into your room at night and pinch your goodies (and other things!). What about buying a small bag of marbles to spread on the floor before going to sleep? Or even nastier, throw a few caltrops on the floor. A caltrop is a small iron ball, armed with four sharp prongs, the prongs placed so

that when the caltrop is thrown on the ground, it always has one prong facing upwards, ready for the unwary foot (ouch!).

Finally, don't forget to purchase the specific "non-standard" tools of each character's profession. Lock picks sets for thieves, spell components for wizards (if used by your magic system) and healing herbs for your clerics, druids and shamans.

More Armour

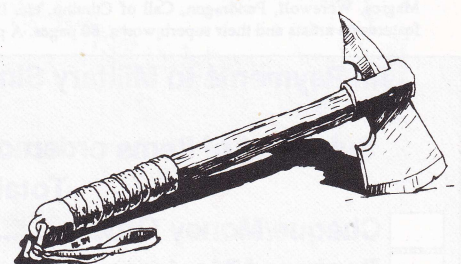
OK. Now you're allowed to buy the rest of your armour, as long as you have some money left. I could fill another article just covering the ins and outs of each type of armour, but for this exercise you only need to know one simple rule: "Buy what your characters can afford."

If your combat system allows piecemeal armour, start with the extremities and move inwards, ending with the torso. Your shield should provide enough initial protection for the body, so it's probably better to finish covering your arms and legs first. If you still have some money left, then you can buy your character a corset of plates, a cuirass or a simple padded jerkin to round off your armour purchases. Only when everyone else has the maximum armour allowable by the system and all other purchase have been made should you buy the warriors some of the good stuff - expensive heavier armour.

Conclusion

As you can appreciate, there are still many topics to cover when it comes to equipping your character. I haven't begun to touch on the benefits of one weapon over another, the best type of armour to choose or which type of animal to pick as your mount. These will, unfortunately, have to wait until another time. But now, depending on the money they started with, your player characters should at least have a basic weapon or two, helmet, shield, useful adventuring gear and some armour. Thus equipped, they're ready to take on anything.

For those characters that lucked out with a poor initial money allocation due to bad dice rolls, I leave you with one last piece of advice. When your characters finally manage to get their first offer of employment, try to get some money in advance. And if they do, shop till you drop!!! ■



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Castell Harlech

Words and Accompanying Photographs by Lee Sheppard

*"Men of Harlech, stop your dreaming,
Can't you see their spear points gleaming,
See their warrior pennant streaming,
To this battlefield.*

*Man of Harlech, stand ye ready,
It can not be ever said ye
For the battle were not ready,
Welshmen never yield.*

*Men of Harlech, on to glory,
This will ever be your story,
Keep these stirring words before ye,
Welshmen will not yield."*

- Men of Harlech, Welsh Traditional Song

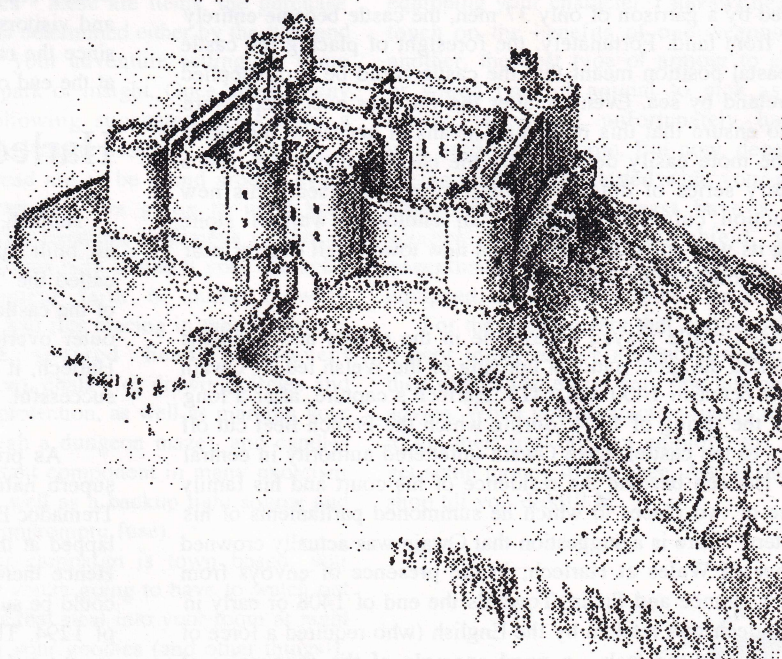
Prior to the Crusades, castle design in Europe, and more particularly the British Isles, was functional but largely uninspiring. In most cases, square towers protected single curtain walls, and the traditional "Great Keep" occupied its detached position in the central courtyard. As well as providing accommodation for the castle's owner, the heavily fortified keep also served as a last bastion should a hostile force manage to breach the outer defences, which apart from the curtain walls, rarely included anything more substantial than a simple ditch or moat. Fortunately, the experiences of those who travelled to the Holy Lands during the Crusades (1096-1291) were to change the face of castle building for nearly two centuries. The next major change in castle design would not occur until the widespread use of cannon.

The European Crusaders were greatly impressed by the massive and virtually impregnable castles of the Byzantine Empire, of which the walled city of Constantinople was a particularly inspirational example. These "new" techniques were soon put to the test by the work of the Knights of St John (aka Knights Hospitaller) who, in constructing Krak des Chevaliers in Syria, built arguably one of the greatest castles of the medieval period. It was inevitable therefore that these same techniques would be taken back with the returning Crusaders, subsequently revitalising castle design and construction

throughout Europe. Some of the best examples of the application of these bold new concepts can be found in northern Wales where a flurry of castle building took place as the English kings sought to subdue the Welsh, and among the finest of these is Harlech, in the county of Gwynedd.

The Building of Harlech

In the late 13th Century, the last native Prince of Wales, Llewellyn ap Gruffydd (the great), broke the uneasy truce between Wales and England. The punitive expedition mounted by the English King, Edward I, was intensified, rather than lessened, after the death of Llewellyn in a skirmish near Builth in December 1282. What followed was a deliberate attempt by Edward I to finally bring Wales firmly under the control of the English Crown. Harlech is only one of a chain of 14 castles built by Edward I, during the period 1277 to 1297. Never again would so much money and resources be channelled into so short a period of construction, nor would the function of the medieval castle as the instrument of royal control be so vigorously expressed.



When finished, Harlech would be positioned at the top of cliffs which faced Tremadoc Bay 200 feet below (the sea has since receded). Edward I, who many historians claim to be the ablest of England's medieval kings, was an expert in castle-construction. He surveyed every site personally, and was usually present when the construction started. Work on Harlech began in June/July 1283, when thirty-five stone-masons and quarriers, accompanied by a squad of carpenters, journeyed from their base at Conwy to the site chosen for the new castle. By the summer of 1286, when construction was at its height, nearly 950 men were employed - 227 masons, 115 quarriers, 30 smiths, 22 carpenters and 546 labourers and minor workmen. In all, Harlech took seven years to build and cost 9,500 pounds (a current equivalent would be in the region of \$20,000,000).



The composition of the permanent garrison had been established in 1284: a constable, "together with 30 fencible men of whom 10 shall be crossbowmen", one chaplain, an artiller, a smith, a carpenter and a mason, "and from the others shall be made janitors, watchmen and other necessary officers". In July 1290, the king appointed Master James of St George, the overall superintendent of Edward's castle building programme, as Harlech's constable, a post he held for three years.

The Defences Tested

Harlech's viability was first put to the test at the time of the uprising of the Welsh prince, Madoc (or Madog) ap Llewellyn in 1294-95. During the siege, in which Harlech was successfully defended by a garrison of only 37 men, the castle became entirely cut off from land. Fortunately, the foresight of placing the castle in a coastal position meant that the castle could be kept supplied from Ireland by sea. Even so, after the war was over, steps were taken to ensure that this remaining means of access to the castle could be more easily defended by the castle's occupants, and a secondary series of defensive works was authorised. This new construction culminated both in an enclosing wall of stone snaking its way down the cliff, and a new tower built over or near the area known as the Water Gate.

Harlech castle played a key role in the events and incidents that marked the great national uprising of the Welsh led by Owain Glyndwr between 1400 and 1413. Harlech's capture, after a long siege in the spring of 1404 (during which the French fleet cut off supplies to the castle), gave Owain unfettered authority in central Wales. Harlech became the residence of his court and his family and one of two places to which he summoned parliaments of his supporters. There is a suggestion that Owain was actually crowned as Prince of Wales at Harlech, in the presence of envoys from Scotland, France and Spain. Towards the end of 1408 or early in 1409 Harlech was retaken by the English (who required a force of 1,000 men for the task - a good example of the economies of manpower which a well-designed castle could achieve) after a long siege and persistent cannonading. Harlech was recaptured by one Harry of Monmouth, the "real" Prince of Wales and future King Henry V and the victor of Agincourt. In an interesting side note to

that battle, there is a reference to the bursting, during the Harlech siege, of a cannon called the "King's Daughter", thereby illustrating that the position of artiller was not without its risks, especially in the infancy of such forms of warfare.

Sixty years later, Harlech was playing a prominent role in the Wars of the Roses when it was held for the Lancastrians by a Welsh constable, Dafydd ap Levan ap Einion, and gave shelter to Henry VI's queen, Margaret of Anjou. Only after a long resistance to the Yorkish siege was the castle finally surrendered in 1468. It was this siege, in which the castle was defended once again by a force of less than fifty men, which is traditionally supposed to have given rise to the song *Men of Harlech*. (Anyone who has seen the movie "Zulu" as many times as I have knows this song by heart.) There is no record that the castle was afterwards repaired, and visitors to the castle today can expect that little has changed since the castle was finally "abandoned", shortly after its capture at the end of the English Civil War in 1647.

Harlech's Features

Harlech, and two of its sister castles, Beaumaris and Rhuddlan, all built during the period 1277 to 1297, show what has been called the "concentric plan" of fortification, in that the buildings of the castle are protected by two closely spaced curtain walls, the outer overlooked and protected by the inner. When looking at Harlech, it is easy to see why this form of castle design was so successful.

As previously mentioned, Harlech Castle was placed on a superb natural site, for in the thirteenth century the waters of Tremadoc Bay were over half a mile closer than they are today and lapped at the foot of the immense crag on which the castle rests. Hence there was a harbour built into the crag, so that the castle could be supplied and reinforced by sea, as evidenced in the siege of 1294. This harbour was guarded by walls which, as it were, constituted part of the outer bailey extending down the cliff. The approach to the upper fortress from the water-gate was a steep path cut into the rock, defended at a point two-thirds up its course by a gate with a ditch and drawbridge, and terminating in a postern gate under the command of the south-west corner tower.

The castle proper occupies a levelled area towards the south side of the headland, leaving a large enclosed but unbuilt area of rock towards the north. The main inner ward, which is the heart of the castle, is a quadrangle surrounded by curtain walls that are parallel on the east and west, but on the north and south splayed outwards to accommodate the great gatehouse which dominates the whole group of buildings from a position astride the centre of the eastern curtain. A lower and slightly outer curtain wall closely envelopes the inner ring of curtain, gatehouse and four circular corner towers, creating a narrow concentric outer ward. In addition, the southern and eastern sides of the castle are further defended by a wide ditch, never designed to be filled with water, but of itself a sufficient obstacle to mining or the bringing up of siege engines. The northern and western walls required no such ditch, the steepness of the cliff providing its own defence.

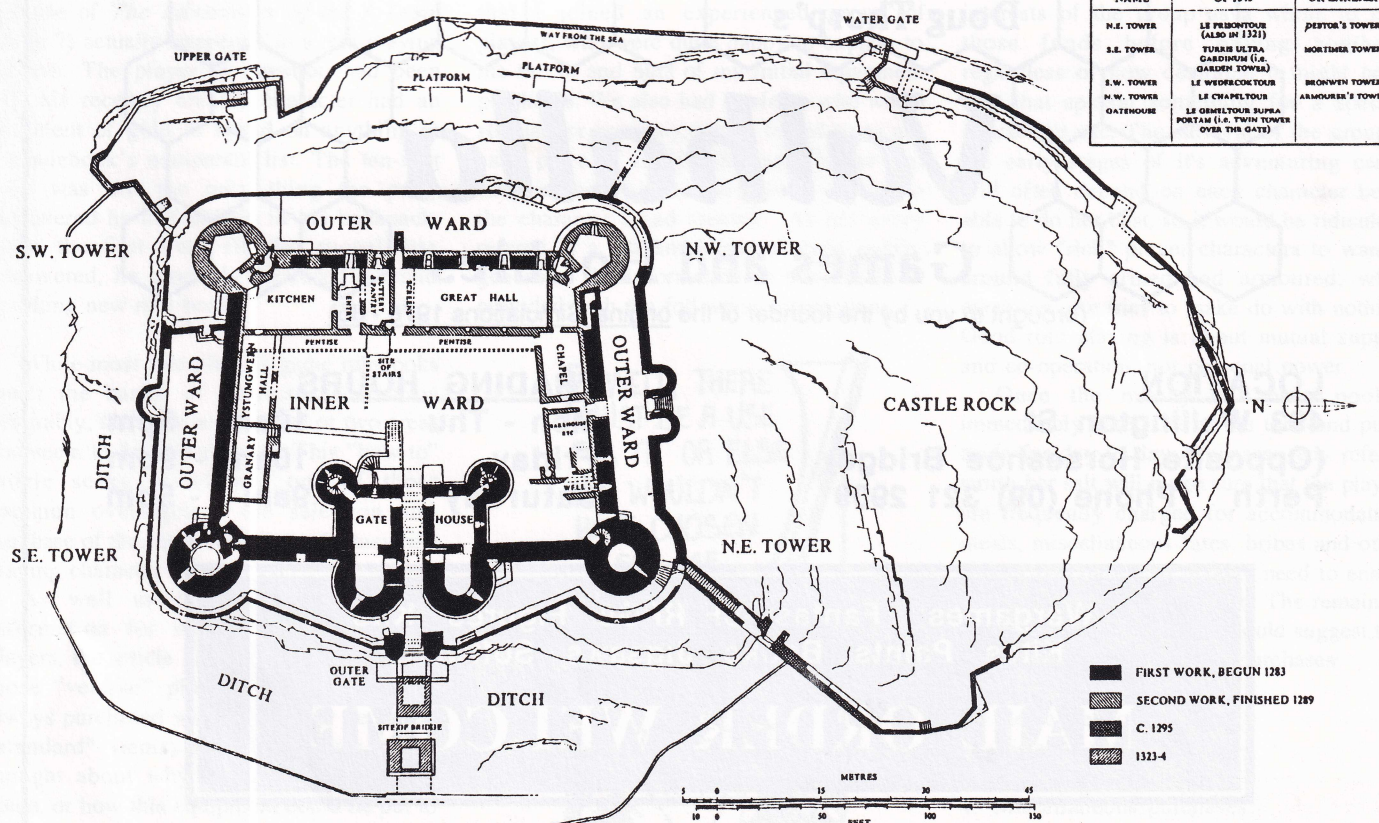
The inner bailey is, in effect, a narrow terrace between two walls. On the eastern, or vulnerable, side, facing higher ground, the castle has a very powerful front. There are two drawbridges and two gateways, the outer gate defended by a two leaved door, and all under fire not only from the walls and towers in front but from the wall-walk of the outer bailey on the right flank. The gatehouse was the real stronghold of the castle, and though the wall-walk is otherwise continuous, the gatehouse was a self-contained defensive unit which could be held even against a force which had broken into the heart of the castle. So long as it could be supplied by sea, Harlech was virtually unassailable.

The gatehouse, the strongest position of defence in Harlech Castle, had four floors although the uppermost floor provided

only battlements, the great majority of it taken up with roofing. The ground floor, apart from containing a number of guardrooms and storage areas, also contained the main gate passage, which in itself deserves special mention. Should assaulting troops have managed to make their way to the castle's front doors, they would be confronted with a series of obstacles, each one having to be overcome before moving into the castle proper. There were no less than three separate portcullises and three sets of double doors in the space of 50 feet, each foot covered by arrow loops from the adjacent guardrooms. Each set of doors and each portcullis was individually controlled, so it was possible to isolate pockets of invading troops between each obstacle and decimate them at leisure. (Kak Des Chevaliers carried this "killing zone" form of defence to its ultimate level, with obstacle after obstacle designed to inflict the greatest number of casualties.)

The next two floors of the gatehouse were identical in construction, each possessing two large chambers for dining, meetings or relaxation etc, two bed chambers and a small chapel. These rooms were occupied by the castle's constable. The remainder of the inner ward of the castle contained a number of single-storeyed buildings, each of which served a specific function. There was a great hall for feasting and entertaining, a kitchen, a buttery (or pantry), a bakehouse, a granary, a communal chapel and a second, smaller hall. Considering the number of buildings devoted to the storage and preparation of food, and given that indications are that the castle only ever maintained a relatively small garrison, we can only assume that entertaining important visitors must also have played a big part in the day to day activities of the castle's occupants.

HARLECH CASTLE GROUND PLAN



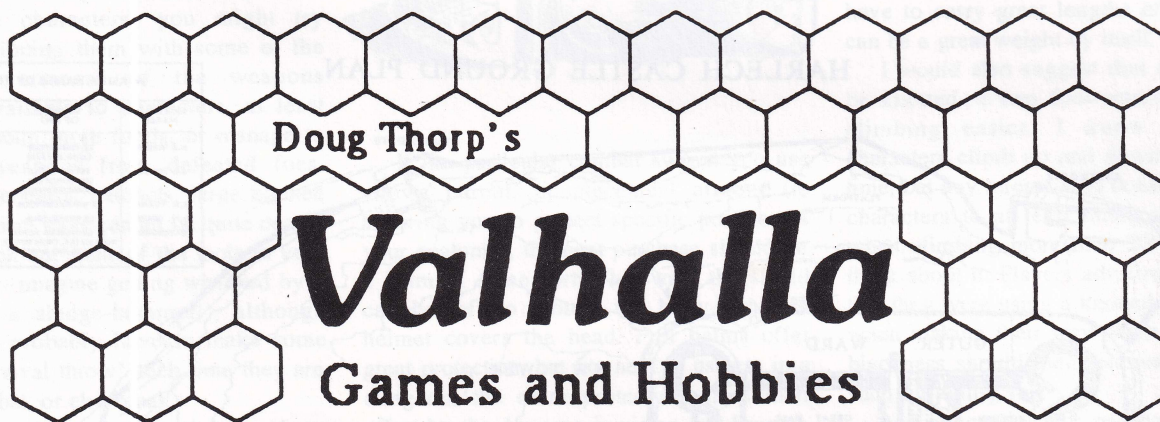
One last minor feature needs to be mentioned about Harlech's construction. The castle's four towers were specifically designed to accommodate the easy movement of defending troops around the castle walls. This is achieved by running the sentry walk around the back of each of the four towers. This represents a compromise: men can be moved swiftly from one part of the sentry walk to another without having to descend to the courtyard level (there being no direct access to the towers from the sentry walk), while the intervening wall towers can, if necessary, hold out as individual strongpoints. A simple enough feature, but one which further illustrates the high level of defensive thought that went into the design.



Conclusions

Edward I's experiences in the Holy Land, when he went on crusade from 1270 to 1272 had a profound effect on the then future king of England. How lucky he was to have seen the walls of Constantinople, and how unlucky the Welsh when that experience was used in building such marvels as Beaumaris, Caernarvon and Harlech, which must remain acknowledged as one of the most perfectly designed castles in Europe.

Castles such as Harlech addressed one of mankind's most basic needs - shelter. Shelter from the elements, from predators and from man's worse enemy, himself. I recommend you consider these factors when next you design a building or dungeon for your fantasy campaign. Take a leaf out of Master James of St George's book and build smart, build strong, build to last. ■



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The Heat of War

A Short Story Written by Mike Dunn
Illustrated by Steve Scholz

"Zulu Nine, this is Delta Bravo. Engage now."

The Griffin pilot's throat tightened. He suppressed fear and keyed the transmit button. "Zulu Nine. Engaging. Out."

A twist of a preset dial put him on the lance frequency. "Alright gentlemen, time to go. Remember, line abreast, straight in, one salvo and jump out. Got that?"

The three 'Mechs under his charge responded in turn. An all-Griffin lance, they had practised harassment tactics countless times together, and were reckoned among the best at their craft. That fact was reflected in their salaries, but also tended to land them the worst jobs. Like this one; performing hit-and-runs on a thirty-Mech assault force. The enemy were heading for an insignificant village in a desert valley; insignificant, that is, except for the super-heavy gun parked in the village square. It dominated the valley and had been holding up the enemy advance for days. They had finally got around to doing something about it.

The lance commander set his Griffin into a walk, quickly picking up to a run, covering the ground at near ninety kilometres an hour. The rest of the lance fell in to his right. They emerged from behind the ridge line that had concealed them and entered the five kilometre wide valley. The enemy force was visible only two kilometres away, trailing a dust cloud that hung heavy on the still air. His IFF transponder bleeped. They had been picked up, and painted as unfriendlies. The enemy commander would be reacting, either deploying the main force or sending a blocking force to keep them from delaying the advance. Success either way, they were delaying the assault or bleeding off some of its strength.

Through the haze the commander discerned four shapes against the backdrop of the dust cloud. A glance at his tactical display confirmed what he had already guessed; four 'Mechs, moving at speed to intercept them, their speed at about sixty. That made them heavies, well able to outgun the Griffins.

In seconds, the range to the blocking force had dropped to less than a kilometre. He disengaged the safeties on his PPC and ten pack, then hit the preheat on the jump jets, readying them for use. The enemy lance became visible through the haze; two Orions and a pair of battered-looking Riflemen. Good, he thought. Not too much long range stuff.

He watched the range counter. Eight hundred metres. Seven hundred. At six-fifty he locked on to the lead Orion, then held a sweating thumb over the double triggers. Six hundred. He fired.

Four missile launchers spoke as one, tracing arcs of thick white smoke through the still desert heat. Simultaneously, all four Griffins lurched ponderously into the air, charring the ground beneath with their jump jets. With the precision of a drill team, all four began turning in mid-air, ready to flee the instant they touched down. Taking rough aim, the commander triggered his PPC at the Orion, now swathed in acrid vapour from missile hits. The bolt hit, blasting chunks from the 'Mech's chest. A burst of smoke billowed from the Orion's missile launcher. The commander swore and cut his jump jets, chancing the rough landing to reach ground before the salvo hit.

He landed hard, stumbling on the hard-packed ground before

regaining his balance. He glanced left, where two of his lance were just touching down. The fourth was still airborne. As he watched, a volley of missiles crashed into the 'Mech's back. Caught off balance, it tumbled, spinning shoulder-first into the ground with a thunderous crash. The other two Griffins were at its side in seconds. They flanked it and gripped an arm each, lifting the stricken machine to its feet. A beam of light licked across the sand metres from the feet of the wounded 'Mech, leaving the ground scorched and smoking. The Riflemen were in range.

The commander made the only decision he could. "Nine-two, nine-three, break contact." He knew the wounded Griffin would slow them down. Better to lose one than three. A deafening clatter filled the cockpit, and his 'Mech shook with multiple impacts.

"Run, damn you, run!" he shouted over the comlink. The Griffins hesitated, then both released the injured third and began lumbering back the way they had come, leaving their comrade in the dust. As he set his own machine into motion, the commander saw laser bolts crash into the fallen Griffin, before it vanished in a hail of missile hits. He'd lost a 'Mech. As the three remaining Griffins sprinted out of range, he wondered if the gun crew knew the price being paid for their safety.

"Battlemechs at four-five, range twenty," called the radio operator. The gunner put down her coffee mug and punched in the coordinates. "Four-five, range twenty," then pressed 'execute'. The cabin shook slightly as the hydraulics whined under the effort of raising the enormous weapon to firing position.

"Gun loaded. Fire when ready," the loader announced over the intercom. The ready light blinked steadily. She looked up, seeing the radio operator watching her expectantly. Her young apprentice, seated beside her, guiltily took her hands from her ears as she glanced across.

"Firing," she said, almost to herself. She smiled slightly and pressed the relay.

To those watching outside, the world seemed to explode about them. Civilians, curious to see what the 'army people' were doing with their village square had crowded the nearby streets, despite warnings from the guarding troops, all of whom were wearing blast gear and damped helmets. Despite this protection, most of the soldiers, inexperienced in artillery garrison, were thrown off their feet by the muzzle blast. The civilians suffered worse. Eardrums popped, eyes were scorched by the blinding flash. The medics were soon busy.

In the heavily insulated control room, the noise was little more than a heavy thump. The gunner quickly began recalibrating her instruments, compensating for the minor shift in the carriage's position. The radio operator called the spotter. "First round gone. Impact in twenty."

The gunner sipped absently on her coffee, and wondered briefly what the enemy had sent them to shoot today. The radio crackled. "Correction two degrees downrange, four degrees west, acknowledge," spoke the observer, sounding more like he was giving his uniform size than correcting super-heavy artillery.



"Two degrees downrange, four west, acknowledged," replied the radio operator. The gunner punched in the figures as he read them back, adding her own adjustments for wind and temperature. She pressed execute, then turned to look at her young apprentice who was frantically entering the figures in the record computer and hopelessly tangling them in her haste. She almost snapped at the young trainee, but relented, and with a patient smile showed the girl her mistakes.

"Gun loaded. Fire when ready." The gunner picked up the relay and passed it to her apprentice. The girl looked at her incredulously. The gunner raised an eyebrow and inclined her head slightly toward the relay. Nervously, the girl took it, croaked "Firing," and pressed the stud.

Again the great weapon roared. The handful of civilians still watching were better prepared, with hands over ears and eyes averted. Young boys cheered and shouted and ran closer, challenging each other to greater feats of daring. Soldiers watched in amusement, glad of the distraction.

Other youths clustered around the feet of the gun's monolithic sentries. Four BattleMechs, Marauders and Warhammers, stood astride the wide roads that led to the village square. A scant handful

of infantry and ground vehicles occupied buildings on these approaches, but it was the two-legged behemoths that would decide any issue the enemy ventured to press.

Their leader, perched atop his scarred Marauder, glanced up as the second shell screamed overhead. Cigarette dangling loosely from his lips, he raised binoculars to his eyes, squinting against the glare from the dusty plain. A touch of the focus slide brought the horizon into sharp relief.

A line of dark specks were visible there, silhouetted against the cobalt sky. To the right of the line, a column of smoke rose vertically. He grunted speculatively. Either the Griffins he had just ordered into combat had earned a kill, or the defenders were down a 'Mech. His eyes flicked to the clock readout superimposed in a corner of the view, then began counting to himself, "...eighteen, nineteen, twenty." On twenty, an immense column of grey dust erupted from the ground, blossoming into a low mushroom cloud in seconds. He chuckled quietly to himself, remembering the times he had been on the wrong end of long range fire. The gun was at its extreme range, yet the second shot had fallen only a hundred metres from the enemy line. The gun crew knew their job.

Sixteen kilometres away, another pair of binoculars was trained on the rising cloud. The forward observer wiped grimy sweat from his forehead then keyed the transmit stud on his headset. "Correction, two degrees uprange, acknowledge," he said crisply. The reply was immediate and, as always, accurate. He swung his gaze across the forces arrayed before him. From his vantage point in the low hills west of the valley, the enemy force presented a daunting sight. Stretched over a kilometre of front, a line of twenty 'Mechs advanced in step. The smallest was a fifty ton Centurion, the largest, a lance of four massive Stalkers, eighty-five tons each. Twenty metal-shod feet struck the ground together with each step, producing a muted thunder that he felt rather than heard. Behind the assault line, lighter 'Mechs patrolled restlessly, shackled by the ponderous pace of their larger brethren. A group of four moved with the formation, but five hundred metres to the flank. The observer had seen this force intercept the Griffin lance, and silently offered a prayer for the pilot of the fallen defender.

"Gun fired, third round gone. Impact in twenty," proclaimed his headset. He began counting silently, watching the intended target point, willing the target to reach it.

It made it. A Stalker seemed to vanish in a grey cloud. The shockwave, a thin shell of super-compressed air ripped outwards from the blast, whipping up tornadoes of dust. The Stalker staggered clear of the dust cloud. Its left side was crushed inwards, the stubby weapons mount shattered and useless. Spruts of coolant jetted from the ruined area, cutting off as emergency valves isolated the damage. The 'Mech's left knee was bent backwards. Walking clumsily, the pilot struggled to rejoin the formation.

Another hit would finish it. Quickly, the observer recalculated, punching the 'Mech's estimated speed and direction into his wristcomp. It beeped quietly and displayed a correction on the tiny screen. He regarded it momentarily, then cleared it and entered a slightly different value in his log. More than once, his intuitive guesses had been the difference between a hit and a wasted shot. "Correction one degree west, point six uprange, acknowledge," he called, watching the Stalker, now a little over three kilometres away. "One west, point six uprange, acknowledged." In seconds, the radio spoke again. "Fourth round gone, impact in nineteen."

Again he waited. The Stalker was dropping behind the assault line, walking with a laboured, stiff-legged gait. That the machine kept moving at all was a credit to the pilot's skill.

The round hit. The Stalker disappeared again, this time not in a cloud of dust, but in a brilliant white flare that made the observer

gasp and tear his eyes away. A sullen rumble like a distant storm echoed across the valley. When he looked back, the gunner could see nothing of the Stalker but smoking debris and a black scar where the explosion had torn the machine apart. The 'Mechs either side of the doomed Stalker stood motionless, overheated to shutdown by the heat of the blast. The observer began calculating for the next shot, singling out one of the Stalker's neighbours.

Hearing the radio crackle, the gunner turned away from her sketch pad. Doodling between salvos helped ease the boredom she had found. "Point three west," mumbled the radio operator through a mouthful of the huge sandwich held carefully in his left hand. She tapped in the figures one-handed, groping for her coffee with the other. Her apprentice handed it to her. She smiled her thanks and hit 'execute'. The radio operator cocked his head, listening to a transmission. "The Griffins are going in again," he said to nobody in particular. The gunner nodded distractedly. She pressed the firing stud, then turned back to her sketch pad.

The Griffin pilot stopped sharply and threw his 'Mech into a desperate turn. A line of explosions sputtered across the dust in front of him. He swivelled right and fired his PPC low, aiming for the Rifleman's weak leg armour. The bolt missed wide. The scream of the overheat alarm sounded again, and again he hit the override, then diverted the last of his liquid nitrogen reserve to the cooling jacket surrounding the missile magazines. The clatter of autocannon hits hammered at his ears. Instinctively, he punched the jump jets, receiving the 'fuel out' tone in reply. Chancing a rear armour hit, he turned and ran hard, leaning left to keep the weight off his battered right leg.

They had managed to finish off the damaged Orion, sniping judiciously at extreme range, but it had cost them three quarters of their missiles and plenty of minor damage from the return salvos. When the three remaining enemy had turned to resume the advance, he had chanced a rush, and managed to get his Griffins close enough to execute a three-mech jump attack on the surviving Orion. They had battered the hapless machine to the ground, each Griffin barely getting clear as the next hammered into their target, before they tore it apart with repeated kicks and punches.

The success had not come cheaply however, the Riflemen quickly opening up with a barrage of laser fire. One Griffin took a gyro hit and ran clear, leaning crazily as the pilot fought hard to stay upright. The other two, the lance commander included, tried to press the advantage but found themselves outgunned, fleeing westwards with autocannon rounds cracking past them.

The lance commander's breath came in short gasps. The heat in his cockpit was well above safe limits. He knew that, but until they were clear he could not stop to open the hatch. Consciously slowing his breathing, he called the defence commander. "Delta Bravo, this is Zulu Nine. Two friendlies out of action, all short on ammo. We can't do much more out here."

"Understood Zulu Nine. Well fought. Circle round, try to get back into town. Delta Bravo out."

The lance commander blinked sweat from his eyes and took a swallow from his canteen. He grimaced. The water was hot. His rear screen showed the Riflemen moving off. He halted his 'Mech, then popped the hatch. Climbing out into the intense desert sun, he took a deep breath and collapsed exhausted on the hatch.

The gunner's apprentice shivered slightly. She moved to a panel on the wall, and adjusted the thermostat up slightly, then quickly moved out of the blast of chilly air blowing from the grille. The radio operator called out another correction to the gunner, who entered it with her usual speed. As the girl hurried back to enter the figures in her record computer, she wondered, not for the first time, why people said war was so bad.

The garrison commander shifted uneasily in his harness. The gun was taking its toll of the attackers, but not quickly enough. They were barely eight kilometres from the village, and over half the assault force were still coming. Calls for air support and reinforcements had gone unanswered. He knew that once the assault line was within a kilometre, it would be too close for the gun to hit them, leaving the out-numbered defenders without support. They had to be kept at arm's length, and there was only one way to do that. He dialled up the gun crew's frequency.

"Gunline, this is Delta Bravo, do you copy?"

"Go ahead Delta Bravo."

"Ah, Gunline, they're getting too close for my liking. We're taking the fight to them. Things are likely to get tight out there, so tell your spotter to make damn sure he identifies his targets."

"Roger. We'll keep gunning for the heavies, so keep clear of them. Good luck."

"Thanks. Delta Bravo out." He switched back his lance frequency. "All units. Form on me. We're going out to meet them."

He routed power to his actuators, feeling the Marauder shudder as test signals were sent to the artificial musculature. All lights flashed green. View-screens showed his lance drop in behind him,



the hulking machines moving slowly like brooding giants wakened from slumber. His breath hissed through clenched teeth as he felt once again the exultation of battle soon to be joined. Whispering the name of his chosen god, he set his Marauder into lumbering motion. Together, the four monsters emerged from the protection of the buildings and broke into a thunderous charge, leaving a storm of dust and sound in their wake.

The radio operator swallowed the last of his sandwich, brushing crumbs from his uniform, then turned to a small console to his right. A screen showed a number of four-letter call-signs. He studied them momentarily, then attacked the keyboard, his fingers moving too fast to follow. He completed the entries with vigorous tap on the execute key, and turned to the gunner.

"IFF codes all check out. The friendlies are logged in."

The gunner nodded. Her own screen showed the locations of the defending machines as white arrows. Alongside each arrow on the tactical display were pairs of coordinates indicating the 'Mech's position. If she tried to enter a correction that would land near those coordinates, the computer would sound a polite reminder that she was about to obliterate a friendly.

The radio operator called out a fresh correction, well clear of the outgoing defenders. She keyed it in and sent the round on its way. On her screen, the target point appeared, pulsing gently. Previous impacts were marked with tiny skulls, some programmer's idea of a joke. They traced a line that started at the top of the screen and zig-zagged to a point quite close to the bottom. She frowned and made a few quick mental calculations. According to the display, they were firing at a point only seven kilometres away. At their current speed, the attackers would be too close to fire at in twelve minutes.

She raised her eyebrows in mild surprise. No attacker had ever come closer than ten kays, even the fast lances that used to make suicide runs when the gun first arrived. She shrugged. There was no danger. Twelve minutes was still a lot of rounds, and anyway, what could possibly get past four heavy BattleMechs?

Sixteen BattleMechs advanced in line. The commander spat blood. Their first pass through the enemy formation had earned them a Rifleman kill, but a chance shot had smashed into his cockpit, showering him with glass and metal. He tried to ignore the cramping pain in his chest.

The attackers had been forced to turn on them. The defenders had swept in on a flank, battering the 'Mech on the extreme end with PPC fire. The enemy commander had quickly countered by switching to a tight circle formation which frustrated any attempts to pick off an isolated unit. Unfortunately, it also rendered them much more vulnerable to artillery fire. The gun was lobbing rounds into the circle at a rate of five a minute, wreaking havoc amongst the tightly clustered enemy. The defenders ran alongside, trading missiles for PPC bolts. When a 'Mech took a leg hit, the four machines rushed in like carrion beasts and pounded the straggler into scrap. It wasn't quick enough. The garrison commander had hoped the attackers would attempt to neutralise the defenders before assaulting the town, but they had simply marched on, perhaps guessing there were no other 'Mechs hidden behind the cluster of buildings. It had cost half their remaining strength, but they had reached the gun's minimum range. The instant the shelling ceased, half the formation stopped and turned on the defending lance. The other half, three Shadowhawks and a Commando, sped towards town.

The commander seethed in frustration. Were he in the town, the light machines would be easy meat. But between his lance and the gun he was to defend stood the remains of the assault force; three heavies and the last Stalker. They had to try. Signalling his lance to follow, he turned to face the Stalker and charged.

The gunner removed her headset and leaned back, stretching her cramped back. The enemy were too close to target now, and were no doubt being cleaned up by the four defenders. Seeing little else to do, she put her feet up and relaxed, enjoying the cool quiet of the control room.

Three Shadowhawks and a Commando reached the edge of the small town. Their leader looked at her rear monitor, saw that two of the defenders had managed to pass the blocking force and were desperately trying to reach them before they reached the gun. She smiled. "Too late, my friends," she whispered. The broad main street opened out invitingly before her. A bend blocked her view, but she knew that at the end of that road was the square, and in that square was the gun that had killed so many of her friends. They advanced carefully, wary of slipping on the smooth paved streets. She chanced to spot a squad of infantry cowering in a five storey building, and laughed at them, contemptuously sparing them from her guns. They reached the bend in the road.

They saw the gun. Thirty metres long, the carriage almost filled the square. Tendrils of smoke curled lazily from the cavernous muzzle. Two squat ammunition carriers nestled against the flank of the carriage. She nodded approval and targeted her autocannon on them. She disengaged the safety.

"Incoming, one o'clock!" shouted her headset.

She looked up in surprise, saw only buildings. She was about to query the warning when an impact on her leg sent her reeling. She shouted in panic as a second hit almost sent her reeling into a building. As warning lights flashed on her console, she looked out to see two Griffins come down the road towards her. Seeing no way past, she triggered her jump jets and wobbled into the air. The move came too late. The Griffins caught her as she tried to jump clear, sweeping her legs out from under her. The redirected jet thrust drove her headfirst into the ground with an impact that shook loose windows, showering the street with glass.

The Griffin pilot winced, seeing the Shadowhawk's head smashed flat. To his front, the other attackers were just bringing weapons to bear. He loosed a PPC bolt at the nearest and ducked into a side street. The other Griffin did the same. The third Griffin, its gyro ruined, leaned against a building near the square, ready to open up on any who strayed his way. He turned to circle back on the Commando he had glimpsed at the rear of the Shadowhawks.

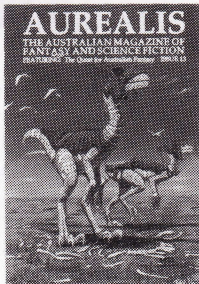
The gunner sat up. For a moment, she thought she had felt something, a tremor like an earthquake. Her apprentice had felt it too, and was looking around uncertainly. The gunner gave her a reassuring smile and dismissed it.

The melee was short and violent. Assisted by the ground troops and a Marauder that had broken through the blocking force, the Griffins had mopped up the surprised Shadowhawks in a brutal short range brawl. With their knowledge of the streets, the defenders had struck and vanished, circling round to strike from different directions. A desperate volley from a jumping Shadowhawk had landed near the gun, but no other fire came close. The heavy lance had suffered heavily, losing three of its number to the blocking force outside town, but reducing the once-mighty assault force to a trio of crippled Thunderbolts. These three, faced with the prospect of entering a strange town with at least three defenders, had turned and fled.

The gunner woke suddenly, aware that someone was gently shaking her arm. She looked up blearily.

"Coming outside for some fresh air?" he asked. "The garrison commander just called. They cleaned up the last of them."

The gunner rubbed sleep from her eyes. "No, I better stay at my post," she said drowsily. "There's a war on, you know." ■



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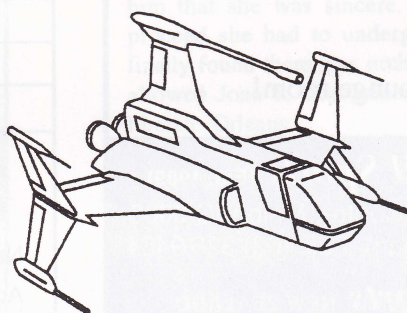
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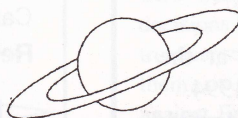
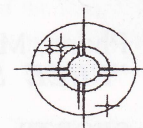


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Apocalypse Here

How To Run A Werewolf Chronicle In Australia

by Ben Chessell

*We are an ancient race for an ancient continent,
We are a dying race for a dying continent.
Grek Twice-Tongue, Silent Strider Theurge.*

Werewolf: The Apocalypse is a game perfectly suited to our huge, wild continent; *Werewolf* has great potential for epic, heroic storytelling, with bold and desperate themes which evoke, and are in turn evoked by, Australia's natural environment. *Werewolf* also has much potential for creative, sensitive characterisation and roleplaying, an aspect of the game which is too often ignored. The plight of the Garou is a tragic one, a pitiful plight of their own devising. No place on Earth is better suited to highlight the fact, to evoke the sense of guilt, tragedy and doom that pervades every Garou's life; to effectively blend Garou spirituality with tribal custom; to make use of vast, powerful wilderness; than Australia. For Australia's Garou have their role in the destruction of the Bunyip tribe to atone for. Furthermore, in Australia there are boundless possibilities for those young cubs who do great deeds, to strike a blow for Gaia, before they too fall victim to bitter infighting, Harano of the Wyrm.

Of the Garou's celestial Triad, the Wyld is strongest in Australia. The vast outback and ever-shrinking forests harbour strange animals, Gaia's early experiments and the unique progeny of the Wyld. Australia's wilderness is some of the very last on Earth that remains mostly unspoilt. The Weaver has made some inroads into the continent, its sprawling temples clinging to the Eastern coast, but remains barred from the harsh interior. Humans, who are too often the Weaver's willing servants are not yet numerous enough to overrun the land with their concrete obscenities. The Weaver's attempt to spin the pattern web across the outback have so far failed, the few railways and roads which bisect the desert being solitary strands, overwhelmed by the power of the Wyld.

The European invaders who came to Australia in the late eighteenth century found a hostile land, inhabited by a people who, in their eyes, were merely savages. The climate was oppressive and the harsh greys and browns of Australia's landscape were an eyesore for European pastoralists, used to softer greens and gentler blues in their homelands. Alienated and resentful, they set about taming the land and its natural inhabitants. Australia's indigenous people, having inhabited the continent for more than fifty-thousand years, possessing an innate spiritual connection with the land, having never been subject to the horror of the Impergium, were quickly and brutally slaughtered and dispossessed of their land.

The Australian Aboriginal people speak of the Dreamtime as both a time and a place. For the Garou, this is near Umbra (or Penumbra), a place where the creatures and spirits of ancient dreaming dwell. The Garou can travel here by stepping sideways, but not all can find their way once they are there, for the Dreamtime is not entirely friendly to the Garou. It is a place of extremes, a more essential and vital version of Australia's own landscape, from whence it sprung. When storytelling in Australia's Umbra, remember that it is the home of creatures of Aboriginal mythology. It is a place of the past, a dreamland which does not obey modern rules. Some places in the Dreamtime are a trackless forest or desert, other are the Umbral manifestations of Australia's powerful Caerns, often coinciding geographically with Aboriginal sacred sites in Gaia's realms, and places of immense potential. Remember too that European Garou are strangers here and that the unfamiliar spirits are not usually sympathetic to the best interests of the Garou.

The Lupus breed is strong in Australia; many Lupus Garou run with the wild dingo of the outback, notably the Red Talons and the Black Furies. Other tribes disdain the dingo, believing them not to be fit Garou stock (a claim easily disputed, for the dingo carry the Garou gene). Dingo Garou characters often experience discrimination at the hands of the Silver Fangs and Shadow Lords.

Once, Australia had another animal which could carry and express the Garou gene. The marsupial wolf, or Thylacine, was a remnant of an earlier group of extinct animals, the megafauna, which can still be found in the Dreamtime. Sometimes called the Tasmanian Tiger, the Thylacine, now extinct, was the stock from which Australia's indigenous tribe of Garou selected its mates. The Thylacine was slightly smaller than the European wolf, sandy coloured, with dark brown stripes across its back. Driven to extinction on the Australian mainland by the introduction of the dingo, the Thylacine lived on in Tasmania where it also was wiped out, this time by human hunters. This was one of the many factors that caused strife between Europe's Garou and the Bunyip tribe.

The history of the Bunyip tribe, Australia's indigenous Garou, is tied to the history of Australia's native Aboriginal people and to the history of the land itself. The Bunyip are also closely linked to the Thylacine, with which they bred, for they too are extinct.

Every last Bunyip is dead.

The Way of the Wolf

(The Garou) cannot deny the call of the spirit-lands just as they cannot deny the howl of the wolf within them.

Werewolf the Apocalypse

Werewolf is a game that requires strong mood creation from a storyteller. *Werewolf* should include violence, action, brutality and blood. The Garou are a warrior race, proud and fierce, and their lives would be unfulfilled without battle. *Werewolf* combat should evoke images of animal savagery, after all the Garou are half beast, and one of the challenges of playing a Garou is to try to think and act like an animal might. They will, especially those of the Lupus breed, tend to react to stress situations as would an animal. Often this means that a Garou's actions will be less sophisticated and more direct. Many Garou prefer action and violence to strategy and peaceful interaction.

The Garou are also innately spiritual creatures, their relationship with the Earth is sophisticated and intricate. Garou have a unique perspective on the Earth, and storyguides should strive to highlight this special insight through subtle use of Garou's gifts and supernatural characteristics. Their Gnosis allows them to interact with, and to perceive, the Earth as no human can. The storyteller should constantly be conscious of the spirituality of the Garou and their relation to the land because of that spirituality. In Australia, this connection is paramount. In the same way that the Australian Aboriginal people are said to be able to sing the land, the Garou, the immune system of Gaia, are a manifestation of the Earth, shards of the planet's consciousness.

Australian Garou spirituality is inextricably bound up with the Dreamtime and Aboriginal spirituality. The kind of spiritual life that Australia's Aboriginal people led before the European invasion is similar to the kind of spiritual life that Gaia's Garou try to lead. Aboriginal contact with, and understanding of, their native country is so innate and so acute that it seems almost supernatural to we who are alienated from Gaia. This is perhaps how the Garou would see us (and perhaps even how the Lupus view the Homids). Werewolves newly arrived from America and Europe find this difficult to accept, but spirituality such as the Garou practice must be learnt and enacted in harmony with the spiritual lie of the land. Any rites or rituals that the Garou wish to perform must be performed in accordance with the spiritual laws and practices of Australia and Australia's spirits. Whilst the Fenris Wolf would be unlikely to answer a call in Alice Springs, Kulpannga the Devil Dingo is more easy to contact. Australian Garou Theurges indulge in Aboriginal ritual, and study carefully the practice and performance of such traditions. Storytellers should acquaint themselves with some Aboriginal mythology and religion and spread it liberally throughout the chronicle.

To wander the Dreamtime is an important part of an Garou's life, and forms part of the Rite of Passage for many of the more spiritually inclined Australian tribes. The Dreamtime is by no means a safe place for the Garou, many of the spirits and animals here do not care for them at all. Aboriginal mythology is full of useful spirits which, with a little work and discretion, can become authentic totems, or creatures to be encountered as the Garou go walkabout in the Dreamtime. Aboriginal legends invariably explain some natural phenomenon or carry some moral message and this is an effective storytelling technique. With a little effort, Australian Garou legends in the Aboriginal style can be created, either as background and history, or as a present day story. How the Garou learnt "Leap of the Kangaroo" is an obvious example of where one might start.

A *Werewolf* storyteller must be aware of a Garou character's perceptions and extraordinary sensory interaction with the world around her; and beyond the merely acute senses, the Garou possess supernatural perceptions. Perhaps it is merely a subconscious, instinctive processing of all the formidable amount of information available to them, or perhaps it has a supernatural component, but all Garou subconsciously use the kind of perception that allows wolves to pick their prey from within a herd of caribou or to know the extent of their territories. This is partially represented by the Talent Primal Urge, and storytellers should use Perception + Primal Urge rolls generously.

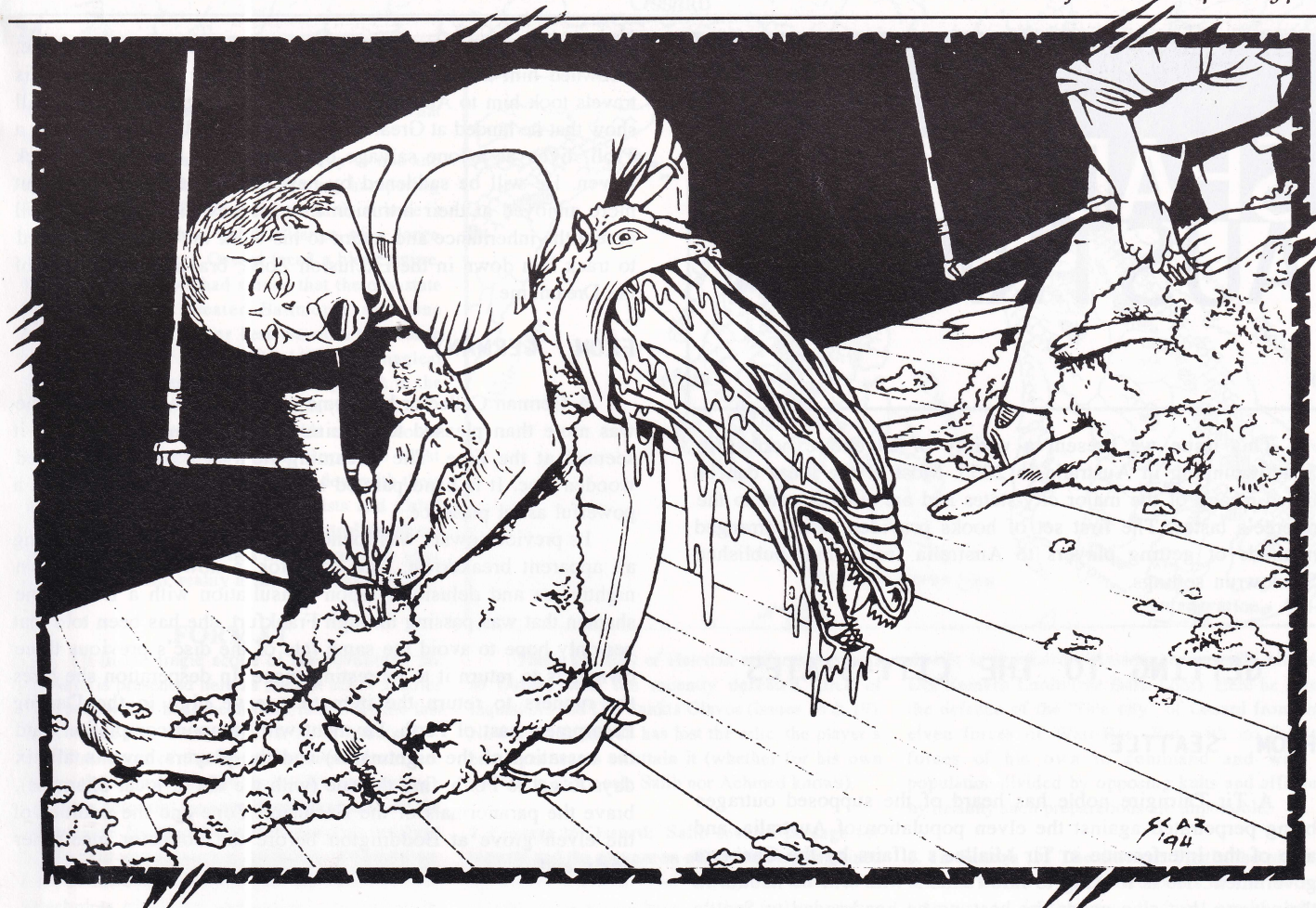
Another important element of *Werewolf* is the gloom of past defeats and of the impending apocalypse. Ever since they first experience the change and meet their tribe and sept, Garou are infested with a feeling of inadequacy to face their impending doom. They are infected by the Wyrms' poison and full of Rage, and they are responsible for the destructive ignorance of the humans, having inflicted the Impergium and estranged the humans from Gaia. In Australia, the Garou have the extra guilt of their role in the destruction of the peaceful Bunyip in the wrongful wars of the last century. You should lace the characters that you create to fill this world with such emotions. Some will feel guilt, others will be instruments with which you can cause the Garou player characters to experience and understand the tragedy of their race. It should be painfully clear that the Garou fight a losing battle in a war for which they are unprepared and inadequate. The Apocalypse looms. Yet some Garou fight on.

A Garou pup's teaching is full of tales of his ancestors and the great Garou heroes of the past. A kind of ancestor worship is practised by the Garou, and some, through the background past-lives have direct access to these ancient Garou, who, though many cannot comprehend the depths to which their race has fallen, can and do aid modern Garou giving them the courage that they need. Past-Lives rolls should never be treated merely as an opportunity for a few extra dice for a particular roll. A storyteller should spend time and effort in creating the past-life characters of his players' characters (one per point is a good guide, but by no means a rule). These characters should be given motivations and personalities, and be friendly and helpful to those Garou whose consciousness they inhabit. Sometimes they will provide information, comfort or encouragement, rather than merely extra dice.

Within every Garou can be found the taint of the Wyrms. Rage, which has led the Garou to commit so many atrocities, but paradoxically makes them capable of supernatural feats of strength and endurance, was sewn in the Garou by the Wyrms itself. A Garou must constantly live with their Rage, finding themselves often just short of violence. Many Garou have committed acts that they deeply regret during fits of Frenzy, another source of guilt and despair. Their lives are full of tension and they find relaxation difficult, indeed it is a foreign concept to many Lupus Garou. Make the players respect their Rage.

Heroic stories are most often the realm of great achievements in the face of hopeless odds, with no hope of final victory. This is the situation that the Garou face. Many have fallen victim to the fatalistic depression which they name Harano, but others have seen their plight in the light of grim liberation. They have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. A Garou strives for a heroic life, and an even more heroic death.

Perhaps most important for Australia's Garou, and too often overlooked in *Werewolf* games, is the wilderness. Wilderness is essential to the Garou. In it they can see Gaia's Earth as it once was, and as it never will be again. The Garou strive to prevent the



destruction of the last wilderness, not only to preserve that little unspoiled Earth which remains, but to ease their guilt and provide them with a retreat from the hell that they, in conjunction with the Weaver and the Wyrms have created. In Australia's wilder areas there are numerous wonderful and unique locations for *Werewolf* stories and scenes. The landscape is often bold and dramatic, or dangerous and frightening. Garou who live in Australia learn to appreciate and respect the power inherent in such places and the natural forces which govern them. Caerns can exist at such diverse and poignant places as the Croajingalong Rainforests in Gippsland, Kakadu National Park, the Daintree Rainforest, Katajuta (The Olgas, see *Caerns: Places of Power*), or even in familiar places such as Byron Bay or the Dandenong Ranges just outside of Melbourne. Environmental destruction is rife in Australia and there is no shortage of work to do. The Australian wilderness is threatened by mining, logging, urban expansion, fire, the Weaver and the Wyrms, and the Garou have the awesome responsibility of protecting this ancient and unique landscape.

In a *Werewolf* chronicle there should be numerous scenes and stories set in these areas. The central activity of the chronicle could be the protection of a certain area of wilderness, through the prevention of some attack of the Wyrms or encroachment of the Weaver. In describing the wilderness you should be bold. Use strong, sweeping language and try to instil a sense of awe at the age and power of the land. Also it is important for the Garou to see that even the oldest and most potent places in Australia are easy prey for the bulldozers and the Wyrms' many minions.

A useful beginning is to choose an area, preferably one with extensive wilderness, and do some initial research. Nothing too difficult, just skim-read a couple of books and find some photos and maps. Think about what the Garou would be doing in the area,

what are their problems here? Then try to decide which tribes might be most involved. Are the Garou fighting amongst themselves in the area? Are they losing their battle here? What is the Garou history of the area and how does it affect the modern Garou's actions? What events are on the horizon?

Information to use when running an Australian *Werewolf* chronicle is easily found. Australian history and geography books are invaluable, and coffee-table books with lavish photography can be extremely useful in enhancing a mood, or sparking an idea. Any library will have a good supply of such books and a little effort will prove very worthwhile. Aboriginal mythology can also provide creatures, atmosphere and material for stories. There are various books about Aboriginal mythology, but a simple book of stories is often the best (try to get one by an Aboriginal author). Use newspapers and recent events to provide more ideas for stories. Most of all, you live in Australia and so should use ideas that come directly from your own observation, experience and imagination.

Whilst vampires in Australia might feel that they are far removed from the centre of kindred activity in the Northern Hemisphere, Australia is as important a place as any in the fight against the Wyrms. Australia's unique wilderness is crying out for protection. Protection by the Garou. One has only to go to the Cradle Mountain in Tasmania, or to Arnhem Land, or Fraser Island to find places that any Garou would howl for. One has to go no further than their own city to find rich and exciting material for a *Werewolf* chronicle.

When the Apocalypse comes here, Australia's Garou will not escape it. ■

SHADOWRUN AUSTRALIA

This issue we present a variety of adventure hooks for Shadowrunning in Australia in 2055. Most of the ideas can be based in any of the major city-states and are subject only to the referee's tastes. The first set of hooks provides easily arranged methods of getting players to Australia from other published Shadowrun settings.

GETTING TO THE CITY-STATES

FROM SEATTLE

A Tir Taimgire noble has heard of the supposed outrages being perpetrated against the elven population of Australia, and also of the interference in Tir Miallae's affairs by the Canberra government. He is looking to hire runners who will be neutral in their views, but also needs the best, so he has headed to Seattle and arranged a meet.

The players will need to go to Australia and Tir Miallae to assess the real situation of the elven population. Simple enough, easy money... So it seems until, for an unknown reason, the players find themselves being followed and fired upon by a group of elves! It seems the truth is that Mr Do Good from Tir Taimgire is really a Mr Big of the growing Elven Gandana crime network and that he is more interested in feeling the waters in Australia than seeing the truth of the elven situation. He has instructed the runners to look into criminal activity that detrimentally effects the elven community (being interested in the competition). A rival faction of the Gandana, the Temple from Perth, has heard of his probing and has ordered its nationwide cells to wipe out the foreign incursion.

FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

One of England's last noble families of strength and influence is killed in a terrible accident when part of the Chunnel linking the UK to Europe is bombed in a terrorist attack. The fortune of the House of Devenish sits awaiting its claim. The executor of the estate is only eligible for his percentage if he can disperse the estate within thirty days. After searching records it would appear that there is a young Richard Devenish, a sole survivor of the family, who made his way to Australia fifteen years ago and has had no dealings with his family since. Regardless of what incident has sent Richard from his family, today he is again to be involved in their affairs. The executor is desperate for his own percentage and will hire the runners, offering them suitable remuneration if they will travel to Australia and track down Richard.

The only solid information on Richard is that he is now twenty seven. The truth is that upon his twelfth birthday he

underwent goblinisation. The family, so horrified by this change, disowned him and forced him from the estate at gun point. His travels took him to Australia (airline and immigration records will show that he landed at Greater Melbourne in 2042). Richard, now a Troll, lives as a lone salvage operator under the name of Rick Deven. He will be saddened by news of his family's death, but more annoyed at their intrusion into his new life. While he will accept the inheritance and return to his work the players will need to track him down in the Exclusion Zone, braving the dangers of the Dreamtime.

FROM GERMANY

A German Collector has come upon a special oddity that she was more than pleased to acquire for a bargain price... or so it seemed at the time. The Dreaming item is a specially carved wooden disc. It is hand painted in typical dot-art style and has a powerful astral presence.

Its previous owner was found brutally murdered after suffering an apparent breakdown. The collector is now having her own nightmares and delusions. Upon consultation with a Dreamtime shaman that was passing through Frankfurt, she has been told that her only hope to avoid the same fate of the disc's previous three owners is to return it to its resting place. In desperation she hires the runners to return the item to a cave high in the Darling Escarpment east of Perth. Payment will be upon completion (and the cessation of the nightmares) and the players have in all six days to get to Perth, find the site (with the aid of local Shamans), brave the paranormals of the Exclusion Zone and the oddities of the elven grove at Boddington before the collector meets her grisly end.

THE CITY-STATES

LOOKING FOR GUIDES

A team of foreign runners have just arrived and they need a guide (maybe a couple) for an excursion into the Exclusion Zone. The runners are completely ignorant of the ways of the Dreaming and will need constant watching. Their work? Well, they are travelling to a special place, an old sacred site, a place that is no longer active, its songline broken.

The guides are supposed to have an easy job, being able to make use of the foreign runners' contacts; the locals are young wannabes and this could be their chance of jumping into the international big league. But first they must survive the job. While it seems simple - them just keeping their eyes open for the odd lone bunyip and the like - it's not actually that straight forward. The broken songline is a Ghost Tribe home ground, it is also a meeting place for free spirits and several members of the Shamans of Djapana. What should be a quick snatch and grab of some long forgotten and now inactive talismans in a gorge becomes an ambush and battle. Do the guides, your runners, spot the signs of oncoming trouble? Do they lead their employers to victory, a lucky escape or... perhaps an early grave?

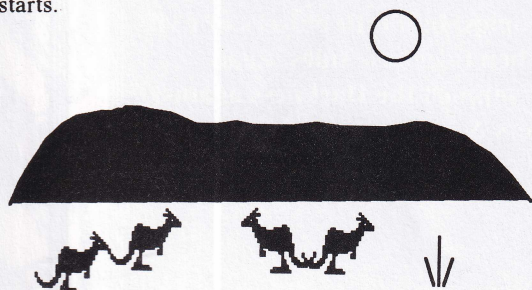
SINGING THE SONGLINE

A group of renegade young shaman are trying to sing the Austside Tower (the old, dead Australian megacorp's head office) into its own Greater Melbourne based songline. It is their goal to turn the abandoned tower into a huge Dreamzone, a place from which the Dreaming can spread throughout the city-state. Such

inexperienced callings by excitable but ignorant (and arrogant) shamans is threatening to make the tower a focus of free spirits and a place of great danger to the unknowing city-state that surrounds it.

The Austside Tower is a one hundred floor high shell. Sealed since the Austside collapse several years ago in an attempt to stop corporate skirmishing over the research and assets held within, ownership of the building has crawled through the courts at an agonisingly slow rate. Today the building is home to squatters, runners and gangs. The structure is accessed by its third floor balconies or the sewers.

A series of rituals and their legacy is what alerts several interested parties as to the goals of the shamans. The most visible sign is a massive increase in the number of paranormal "entries" into the inner city, where suddenly rampaging bunyips seem to become a regular midnight occurrence. With several megacorps, Marega, and even the city-state government getting concerned there will be no shortage of potential employers looking for an independent group to make enquiries, conduct surveillance or proceed with anonymous and apparently random dispatches of the upstarts.



THE MIG-MIGELL

Set in either of the Republic's two major research centres (the Adelaide Twin Cities or the Brisbane Plex's Gold Coast district) the players hear a rumour doing the rounds that the local corp structure is after the legendary decker group known as the Mig-Migell; the elite of Australasia's matrix cowboys. The word is that Rhythm (reputedly the best decker in the region) has found something that's even a little too hot for him to handle. He's gone into hiding and everyone is offering everybody anything to find him. The corps are looking for him, his fellow Mig-Migell boys are looking for him, even Marega is looking for him. With a dust storm gathering above the city-state and a toxic haze blowing in from the ocean it seems one hell of a battle is about to be unleashed.

Rhythm, an Aboriginal decker, has come across some just completed prototype attack and defence programs. Very lethal, very advanced (requiring the latest deck and access to a mainframe to run them); alas, the programs are still full of bugs, and the overly excited word on the street has helped push things a little over the top. Rhythm is hiding out, knowing there is at least a dozen different parties who want him slugged, while as many want to "talk" to him.

The player's Mr Johnson will contact them and ask if they are interested in an escort run. It will be an operation in which they will need to lift Rhythm from an arcology basement he is holed up in and then get him clear of the city-states. His destination is the Exclusion Zone, to a band of waiting Marega people. This will play as a great chase scenario, and also gives the players a chance to make contact with the very best decker in Australasia. ■

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DICE ARE DEAD

Play-By-Mail Column

FEATURE REVIEW

Star Quest II

Post-It Games

Reviewed by Jerome Hope

Have you ever wanted to be the leader of an entire world, conquer alien races, compete as a space pirate or trade merchant? If the answer is yes to any of these questions then *Star Quest II* is for you.

Star Quest II is a large scale game of space exploration and military conquest, in which you start out as the commander of a small clan. You control one of the former Imperial colonies which has been conquered by the tyrannical overlords. Your apparent mission is to expand the riches of your clan for the Overlords whom collect a tribute from you. They have little interest in how you do this as long as you continue to pay your taxes. However, you also have a secret quest, which is to build your clan's assets to a position where you can overthrow the Overlords and restore the Imperium to its former glory. Along the way you will be trying to gather votes to have yourself proclaimed Emperor of the New Imperium.

The game begins with you in control of a homeworld, a few ships, a small army and a handful of credits. From here you have to find trading planets and partners with whom you can deal so as to build upon your limited assets. To find trading partners you can advertise on the game's bulletin board, telling other players you are willing to trade; otherwise you can explore worlds, seeking those suitable for colonisation.

The best worlds to colonise are those with a high Habitat level and low Alien Life Forms (ALFs). Once you've found a suitable planet you simply send in the marines - infantry, navy, Cybernetic Battle Units and whatever else you can muster to throw at the enemy. But be careful, the effectiveness of ALFs varies from world to world, so the number of ALFs is not always reflective of their combat power. After you've successfully eradicated the ALFs (no-one said this game was politically correct!), it is time to ship in the colonists, remembering to keep them supplied, and then send in the terraforming and development units so that

you build up the world's habitat and industries. After a few turns with any luck you will have two or three colonies developing goods with which you can trade so all the profit is yours to spend.

Now, what to spend your gains on? You can increase your world's security to protect you from spy attempts, or better yet, you can send out spies of your own to check out the progress of other players. These spies can report information on world characteristics, unit strengths, ships over the world and allies. Spies can also steal technology, sabotage a world's industries, or smite the population - terrorism! All of these options are costly but help your cause.

Credits can also be spent on increasing your position's attribute levels in any of five areas - Navy, Army, Resources, Colonisation and Trade. These affect the way in which your growing empire reacts with the game. *Star Quest II* also has a galactic lottery which is a great idea as it allows every place the chance to catch-up or get ahead by winning heaps of dough. Tickets cost 1000 credits each and the average winnings are about 90,000 credits!

Each Empire has a technology matrix, the values for which are set at the beginning of the game. The matrix has 20 different technology areas, each with nine different fields and 10 levels. Basically it raises your clan's knowledge in each of the 20 areas; eg., improvements in the Cons/Sup area reduces the cost of producing construction and supply points. Other areas such as lasers improve your ships' combat ability with lasers. Your job is to find the exact value value between 1 and 999; to do this you have to allocate credits to your research fund. This is where allies and other friendly Empires are important, as the more information you can trade, the better your chances of success.

One of the better features of *Star Quest II* is that it is possible to build any ship design you can come up with, so long as you have the necessary construction points, credits and navy attribute. This allows you to tailor-make ships as you need them. You can build ships with huge cargo holds for trading, or else create warships armed with hellfire shells used for destroying worlds, or a survey craft with massive sensor arrays.

The game comes with a large amount of set-up material which includes a 52 page operational and technical manual and two large star maps which are based on our galaxy. The star maps show the location and ID number of the 749 stars that make up the *Star Quest II* universe. The number of stars does not vary from game to game, but the number and characteristics of each star's planets and satellites does so that no two games play the same.

The turn reports are very comprehensive, containing economic and physical characteristics for all of your controlled worlds. The economic information includes agriculture, mining, manufacture, construction and supply along with the production levels, type, stockpile and market values of each of these industries. The physical characteristics include such things as planet population, habitat, size, atmosphere, temperature, gravity and world loyalty to name but a few. The reports also list all the ships of your fleets, with details on all 31 of their characteristics, along with their current location and movements for that turn. Other features include Overlord actions, general reports, colonisation and trade reports along with world and star surveys. If this were not enough to keep you busy, the turn sheet also tells you about auctions for technology values, clan communications, clan rankings, and technology field updates. At first all of this information can be overwhelming, but it is actually very easy to understand. Mind you, once you have a lot of assets it can become a major task to keep a track of everything at your disposal; a PBM for people with the time and inclination to really get deep into the game universe.

There are two main objectives which must be met for a winner to be declared: 1. all Overlord homeworlds must be captured (there is between 1 and 10 of these), and 2. a clan must accumulate 5000 honour points. Honour points are accumulated in the five

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ranking areas (and you gain 500 honour points for capturing an Overlord homeworld).

Turns are processed every two weeks with amazing reliability. The cost is \$6.00 for the first 40 orders with extras costing more, up to a total possible 200 orders per turn. A quick word on Post-It Games; they have a postage paid service which is extremely handy, not only do you save on stamps, but you don't have to worry about running down to the Post Office before it shuts - allowing extra time to pour over your reports and plot your move. The service from Chris and Nadine Edwards is excellent, both are always willing to answer any questions you may have, and any errata found in the rules or turn sheets are fixed as soon as they are identified.

Star Quest II is an exciting game with a wealth of depth and lively player interaction. Those players who enjoy a PBM challenge, this game is for you.

PBM AWARDS

The PBM companies are largely run by hard-working, friendly people with minimal rewards, and each of them deserves some recognition. The Flagship Awards are a good way for players to say "Thank You" to their GM. Please take the time to fill out this voting form. ■

The Analytical Engine

by Peter Crank

I've seen this movie three times already, but you know how it is; you start watching, with every intention of switching it off in a couple of minutes (you just want to see that part where they...) but you're hooked, sunk, lost. You go from standing with the remote in your hand, to sitting on the edge of the couch, then you're in the couch; then you go to the fridge for a beer and its all over; you've caved in. You are there for the duration. Its Sunday night, *Lethal Weapon 3* is on, the column is overdue and what can I say? If it wasn't for the commercials and a pad and pencil I'd be history. If I had a real job and had to get up in the morning I wouldn't be semi-blitzed in front of the television; I'd be in bed early so I could catch the bus and then I'd have plenty of time to read books. I'd have plenty of time

to read real books, not the too-disgusting-to-be-let-into-a-sewer-treatment-plant stuff the publishers foist on you. Even when they send decent material it doesn't work out. I received in the mail, from Hodder & Stoughton, a review copy of David Wingrove's *The Stone Within*. Very nice thanks, but its volume four of a massive work and I haven't read volumes one through three (and I'm not about to rush out and get the first three out of my own funds thank you very much - well actually I did buy volume one but its on the bottom of a sixty book stack awaiting review so I don't like Wingrove's chances this century). Anyway, TV - who thinks up the crap they put in commercials? How about the one with the guy whose head turns into a capsicum, then a tomato, isn't it the best?

Movies man, are the first virtual reality technology (sure books too but I don't call books a technology, they're too obvious to be a technology - just an extension of scribbling signs in the dirt with a stick). I love movies. I just wish I had the time and money to see more, or that I wrote a damned movie review column! What I do write (with a nod in the direction of my gracious editor) is a column about anything I bloody well please actually, because I never seem to get away from this bloody PC often enough to

AUSTRALIAN FLAGSHIP PBM AWARDS

You are invited by The Flagship Magazine and Australian Realms Magazine to send in your RATINGS for Play By Mail Games you have played in 1994 in Australia and New Zealand. We would like you to rate them in the following categories:

ANTICIPATION:	1 = Who cares, 10 = My world revolves around each turn
GM:	1 = Pathetic & Abusive, 10 = Deserves the Nobel prize
DEPTH:	1 = Easier than breathing, 10 = Needs many years to crack
INTERACTION:	1 = No diplomacy allowed, 10 = Dozens of messages each turn
VALUE FOR MONEY:	1 = Total rip off, 10 = Grossly underpriced!

GAME	COMPANY	ANTICIPATION	GM	INTER	VALUE

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Please mail this sheet to:

Australian Flagship PBM Awards, PO Box 858, Kogarah, NSW, 2217.

Results will be announced in late January via Flagship, Australian Realms, The World Beyond and at the Can Con PBM Banquet.

Thanks for your participation!

read a book, let alone review it. Reviewing movies must be so easy, man. No pain of slogging through a real lemon, just sit back with your popcorn, take it all in, scribble a few notes in the dark and your off! There ain't no justice.

I've loved movies forever. Since I could see I think. I remember watching classic movies as a very small child with my mother because my dad always fell asleep and my mom wanted the company especially for the late late shows. (Big hint here, folks - I come from a country where they actually show good old movies on TV all the time; we're talking SF, Horror, Bogart, Cagney, Gene Kelly... In this country of Australia the TV execs and programmers are thinking only bottom line; minimum of effort for the maximum advertising revenue. Sports and pseudo-news, bullshit sitcom imports...but I digress, bigtime!).

In a very round about way we have come to the subject at hand, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction* (Aurum Books, a steal at \$25 from Dymocks, down from \$59.95). There may not be many left by the time you read this, so put me down instantly and race to your nearest mall... no wait; grab the Yellow Pages, look under "B" for book sellers (retail) and ask Dymocks if they have any left, or can get one in for you. This book is a gem. You may not always agree with the reviewers call on a particular movie but I guarantee you'll feel you've gotten your money's worth. I couldn't put it down for three days. This is the second edition, published in 1991, so the really recent stuff isn't there, but if you love old Science Fiction movies you don't care about that. It's the fifties & sixties you want. Movies like: *The Fly*, *It Came From Outer Space*, *This Island Earth*, *I Married a Monster From Outer Space*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Doctor Strangelove*.

Appendix Two contains the top ten lists of a number of well known reviewers and SF authors. Some movies are definitely food for argument (*Bladerunner* and *2001* for example) with some rating them as top ten material and others calling them utter crap. For what its worth my top ten SF movies of all time are (in no particular order and compiled under the influence):

- 1: *A Space Odyssey* (Wow, Man!)
- 2: *Alien*
- 3: *Aliens* (go get 'em Space Marines!)
- 4: *Terminator*
- 5: *Terminator 2* (that Arnie!)
- 6: *Blade Runner* (I like the Director's Cut the best)
- 7: *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (made in 1957, the year the space age was born)
- 8: *Forbidden Planet* (seen it 13 times)

9: *The Time Travellers* (strange little movie, great down-beat time-looped ending)

10: *The Fly* (the original with Al Hedison & Vincent Price, though the remake was good)

When I'm not watching reruns or lost in the Net, I can usually be seen taking the sun, with a cheap and trashy war factoid in one hand and a refreshing cup of coffee in the other. A company calling itself 22 Books (22 calibre? 22 books in their catalogue? I don't know) have released a line of these "factoids" about the SAS. I have in my possession the titles: *Soldier A: SAS (Behind Iraqi Lines)*, *Soldier B: SAS (Heroes Of The South Atlantic)*, *Soldier I: SAS*, and *Soldier L: SAS (The Embassy Siege)*. The titles being influenced by the book *Soldier I: SAS* which was originally published by Bloomsbury and purported to be the life of one SAS trooper (not bad, sagged a bit in the middle).

I was suspicious at first, I admit it. Factoid? Is that a synonym for "pack of lies"? I decided to do some research. As luck would have it *Bravo Two Zero* by Andy McNab (and I can't give you publisher or price because the bastard I lent it to lost it!) has recently been released and the details contained within it could be cross checked against *Soldier A*. Amazing. They do seem to be factoids after all! Many of Mr McNab's adventures are retold from the point of view of fictional characters in the factoid. Also other incidents I managed to dredge up from other sources (the book *Desert Storm: What We Learned* is highly recommended) confirmed other details in *Soldier A*.

I spent a lot of time on researching these books' contents not because I want to provide you with the best level of criticism and analysis your dollars can buy, but because I'm a war mongering xenophobe and I just eat this stuff up. A smaller but similar exercise with the other books mentioned above returned similar results. These books are reasonably okay as to events, its just dialogue and basic story-telling skills that take a hammering. Mr Shaun Clarke's idea of good natured camaraderie has hardened SAS troopers talking to each other like oversexed barely pubescent schoolboys. McNab, on the other hand, while not a great writer by any stretch, has a way with his words that adds, to rather than detracts from, his story. Buy *Bravo Two Zero* and be amazed at what a motivated and highly trained individual can do. Buy the *Soldier X* series for a good laugh.

Speaking of laughter, do you know a good antidote to laughter? Its watching your usage charges go through the roof when you try to download the entire contents of all of Compuserve Pacific's Science Fiction & Fantasy Forum Libraries. I'm afraid to type

in GO CPRATES to check my bill anymore because I don't think my Visa Card limit goes that high. Despite the cost I think Compuserve is the ideal environment for many of us. If you've ever tried to download stuff from the Internet then you'll appreciate how easy Compuserve can be. The only hassle is the 9600 BPS limit. There are, for those of you who don't know, forums on every conceivable subject within Compuserve and what isn't there can be found on Usenet (a part of the Internet) which is easily accessible from Compuserve (though Compuserve carry out a subtle form of censorship by not displaying the titles of the more "objectionable" groups - they can be reached if you, "ahem", know where to look).

Today I downloaded the series synopses for *Star Trek:TNG* and *The X-Files* from the SF forum, so I know what to expect over the coming weeks. Pitiful isn't it. I also grabbed a GIF (a picture to you technophobes) of the new Star Trek Voyager craft, as well as a GIF of the new crew. As we poor souls downunder have only just started seeing the *Deep Space Nine* episodes I wouldn't hold your breath waiting for Voyager.

What really took my fancy was a complete rundown on the storyline for the new Next Generation movie *Star Trek: Generations*. Major studios conduct test screenings of new releases and the audience reaction can determine whether the edit needs adjusting, or a re-shoot is necessary. *Fatal Attraction* had its entire ending reshoot based on a research screening. Well a bunch of Trekkers were invited and a fellow named J. Young recorded his thoughts on the film and provided a very complete synopsis of the story. The movie sees release on 18 November in the US. God knows when we'll see it, probably the Christmas holidays. There are a few surprises for fans in *Generations*, you'd be wise to review events in the last couple of seasons on ST:TNG before you go. I won't spoil it for you, but if you want a copy of the file drop me a note on Compuserve, or hassle Nick.

The complete text of Anne Rice's advert in praise of the film of her *Interview With The Vampire*, was available so I took a look at it. Interesting, if a bit shrill. As if we cared what she thinks. Maybe she was concerned about her percentage of the gross. I can't wait for the movie so we can "dissect" the film, the book and Ms Rice all together in one column. Won't that be fun. Until next time. (When I promise a TRUCKLOAD OF REAL BOOKS) maybe...

[Please drop me a line: Compuserve 100250,3713. From the Internet 100250.3713@compuserve.com]. ■

THE ADVENTURES OF THE GREEN BY EDGAR + DANIELS

SO WHAT'S
IT LIKE BEING DEAD,
THEN, SPUD? DO YOU
GET HUNGRY?

IT'S FUNNY, YOU
KNOW HOW THEY SAY
YOU CAN STILL FEEL
AN AMPUTATED
LIMB?

CLASSIC
RPG
SYNDROME.

WELL, WHEN YOU'RE
ONLY A FOOT, YOU
CAN STILL FEEL THE
REST OF YOUR BODY.
I CRAVED CHIPS
AND A COLA!

ROLE
PLAYER'S
GUTS!

HOW WE
GONNA GET UP
THERE, THEN?

CLIMB!

I THINK
NOT.

HOW
ABOUT
THIS?

SURELY YOU
DON'T EXPECT US
TO GET INTO THAT
PLOT DEVICE?

LOOKS
ALRIGHT
TO ME.

HAVEN'T YOU
NOTICED THAT IT'S
PEAHAPS A LITTLE
DIFFERENT, MANGO?

ERM...
NO-ONE
TO LOAD THE
LUGGAGE?

LUGGAGE?

LOOK! IT'S
BEING DRIVEN
BY A BAT!

AND THOSE
HORSES! THEY'RE
SNORTING FIRE!

PROBLEM
WITH THAT?

IT'S GOTTA
BE A TRAP! AN
EVIL TRAP!

YEAH, BUT
IT SURE BEATS
WALKING.

NICE DRINKS
CABINET.

SHANA'S
RIGHT!

WE MUST,
ERM...
CLIMB,
I GUESS.

YOU
WISH.

WHAT'S THE
WINE LIKE?

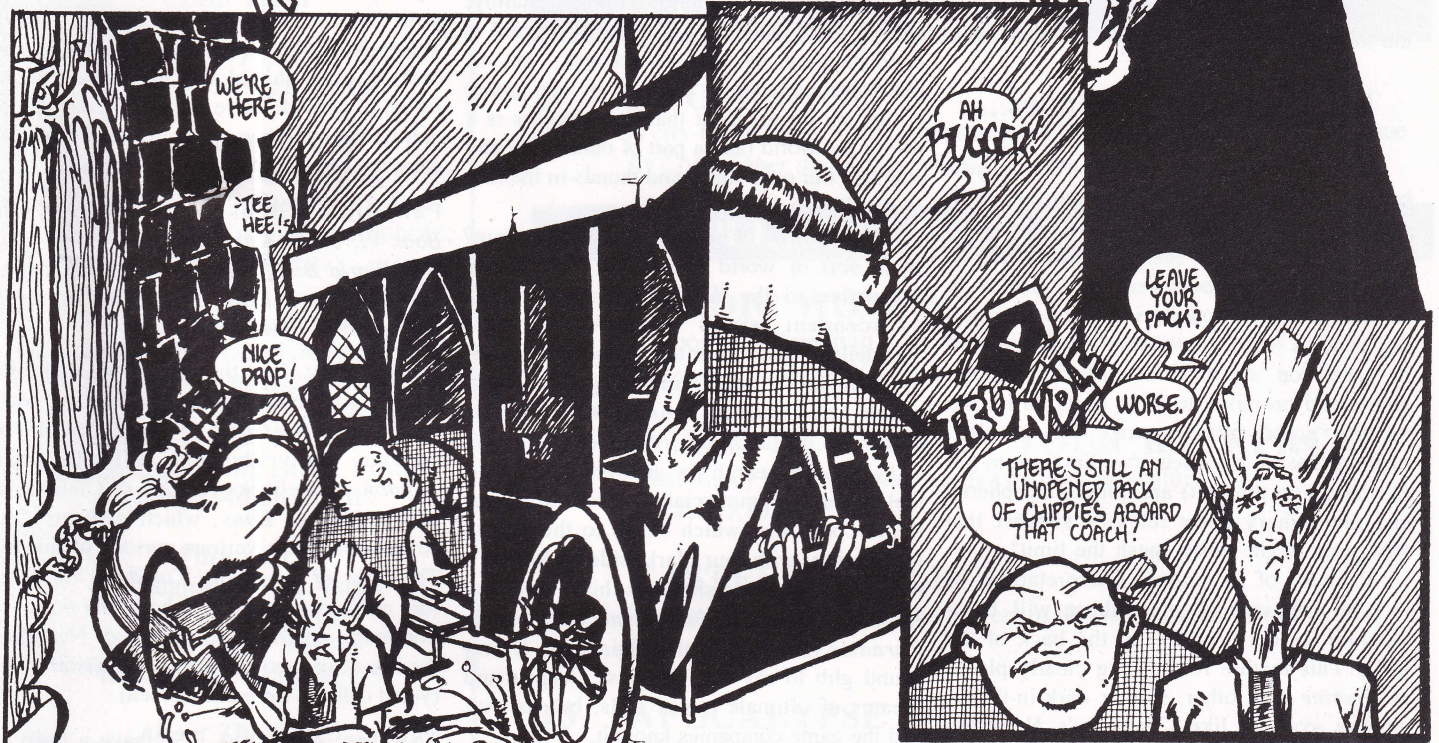
RED.

BIT THICK
AND IMMATURE,
THOUGH.

OH, AND
LOOK! CHIPPIES!

OOO!

CRISPY
GOBLIN FLAVOURED!
YUMMY!



BattleTech Animated Series

The BattleTech animated series premiered on syndicated television in the US on the 24th September. Made by the same company that brought us the X-Men animated series, each episode of BattleTech also includes 3 minutes of computer generated animation, reported to be some of the best ever seen in a typical Saturday morning cartoon show.

Expect a host of computer games, comics, toys and other promotional material next year. And if similar productions are any indication, you may even be able to pick up your next Black Hawk miniature with a cheeseburger, fries and coke. All joking aside, if this animated series gets more people interested in roleplaying, then we all win in the long run.

The Darkness Continues...

Originally scheduled for a GenCon release but put back whilst the all-important cash generating *Illuminati New World Order* card game is output, Steve Jackson Games' newest rpg should be in stores very soon. Called *In Nomine*, this new roleplaying game of angels and demons (oops, there's that naughty word!) is based on an original French-language game, and promises to have quite an impact on the gothic-punk genre. The preview pictures that we have seen (we have yet to get our hands on the text) are quite atmospheric, and preliminary news releases suggest that this game might really "push the limit".

Because of its unique interpretations of modern religious themes, there will be a "Mature Readers" notice on the back of the book. This mature readers tag clearly places *In Nomine* with other, similar dark-in-theme gaming systems like Chaosium's *Nephilim* and the White Wolf Storyteller series of games. I just hope that this continued interest in dark, horror-orientated games doesn't eventually end up doing more harm than good. The last thing the gaming industry needs is its own "*Seduction of the Innocent*", an enquiry which almost wiped out the comics industry in the 1950's.

...And Gets Darker!

White Wolf games have just announced the creation of **Black Dog Game Factory**, "a branch of our game studio that is dedicated to producing artistic roleplaying games and supplements for an older, more mature reader. The Black Dog imprint artistically pursues themes and issues that gaming has never been allowed to address...

the intent is not to produce books glorifying violence or exalting villains. Our enemies will be shown in a negative light, whether they be Spectres or Black Spiral Dancers. However, we feel that exploring such enemies and their ways is one method of enriching roleplaying and expanding understanding of our world setting. Understanding evil is not the same as exploring it."

It is interesting that the press release reads more like an apology than the usual hyper-excited propaganda. But you do have to admire the guts of White Wolf, that they are willing to make a stand, even if it is ill-defined: "we have the personal (and company) integrity to not depict misogynistic, racist or homophobic behaviour or violence, drug use and the like in a favourable light. Certainly, part of what White Wolf is built around is understanding the lure of darkness... but the inevitable conclusion inherent in our games is that we must accept that the darkness is a part of the world (and a part of ourselves), and maintain our own ethics and morals in the face of that."

Which are? Where is the vision here? What sort of world should we build as an alternative to the World of Darkness. The transcendent states proposed by the Storyteller games are often too poorly defined or Utopian to serve any purpose to real people. Not that the artists are entirely to blame; we, the audience usually don't want to help in the search for answers. It is a fact that the more commercially successful art has largely been that which caters to the human fascination with our dark side - Milton's *Paradise Lost* overshadows his *Paradise Regained*, and Dante's *Inferno* eclipses his *Paradiso* in the popular imagination. It may sound glib to say that darkness, despair and dreams of ultimate power sells, but its true, and the game companies know it.

Black Dog Games promises several "arty", adults only releases for 1995, including a science fiction rpg called *Hol* and adult supplements for each of the four Storyteller games - *Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage & Wraith*.

New Releases

On a much lighter side, its time to think about what you'd like to stuff into your Christmas Stockings (I've always thought that Gift Vouchers from gaming shops are a great idea). Here is a selection of some of the expected releases over the coming months to help you make your choices:

FASA Corporation: *Black Thorns* scenario pack and *Invading Clans* sourcebook for BattleTech. Also for BattleTech is the 2nd

Edition of *CityTech*, the game of urban 'Mech conflict. *Divided Assets* is a Shadowrun adventure for the previously released *Denver* boxed set. For Earthdawn fans there is *Creatures of Barsaive*, chock full of bitey, spikey and slimy things to chomp on your adventurers. A softback version of the Earthdawn rule book has also been released for those with limited budgets.

R.Talsorian Games: Expect a number of sourcebooks for Castle Falkenstein in the next six to twelve months, including a Host's Guide, Steam-Age Inventions supplement and a USA sourcebook (we'll have to beat our Assistant Editor with a stick to shut him up when these come out). For Cyberpunk fans, *Chromebook III* should now be out, as well as the *Pac Rim Sourcebook*. *Mekton Z*, the re-write of the Mekton game should also be out very soon, for all of you who love Mecha (How many of you remember when Astro-Boy and Gigantor were the *only* Mecha you could think of?).

Palladium Books Inc: *Rifts World Book VI: South America* should be out now, with *World Book VII: Undersea* put back to March 95 and *Rifts Dimension Book II: Phase World* muted for January.

Chaosium: For those of you that like finding big slobbery things under your beds, Chaosium have *Cairo* ("Would you like to buy this pretty Shoggoth, Effendi?") and *London* sourcebooks for Call of Cthulhu, as well as *Strange Eons*, which presents CoC adventures set in various periods of history. The *Atlas of the Young Kingdoms* for Elric! (the northern continents) should be out now. Following on from the release of *Nephilim*, the occult rpg, comes the *Gamemaster's Veil* (you'd call it a Referee's Screen).

TSR Inc: As always, TSR have a heap of goodies ready: *The Crusades* campaign book, *In the Abyss*, a Planescape adventure (Get down, Adam - good boy!), *Caravans* - an Al-Qadim sourcebook and adventure, and the *City Sites* AD&D accessory are some of the more interesting releases scheduled for Nov-Jan. The most amazing TSR release scheduled for December is Volume 1 of the *AD&D Encyclopedia Magica*. These volumes (and note, this one only covers A to C) are reported to include EVERY magical item EVER published by TSR in any of its publications. This would seem to suggest an eventual outlay by readers of approximately \$500 for the complete set (that's not including a yearly update, of course) - one for those with more money than sense.

...see you 'round like a D100!

THAT WAS THE NEWS

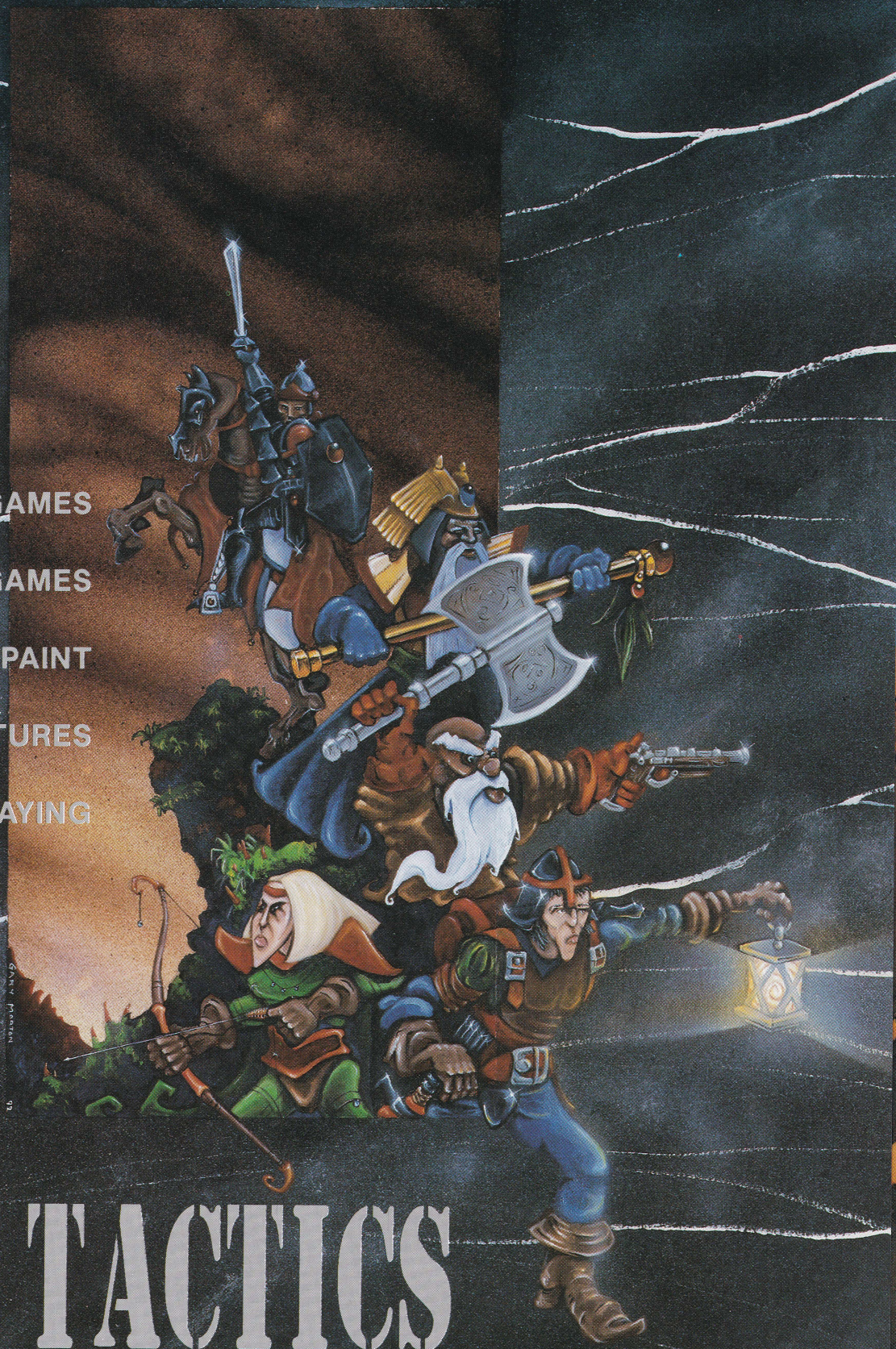
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